

EDITED BY
JAN-WILLEM VAN PROOIJEN
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A stylized graphic of a bomb with a lit fuse. The bomb is represented by a black rectangular base with a white 'X' on top, and a grey cylindrical body. The word 'AND' is written vertically in white on the left side of the bomb, and a large white 'P' is on the right side. The bomb is positioned to the left of the main title.

POWER POLITICS PARANOIA

WHY PEOPLE
ARE SUSPICIOUS
OF THEIR LEADERS

CAMBRIDGE

Power, Politics, and Paranoia

Powerful societal leaders – such as politicians and chief executives – are frequently met with substantial distrust by the public. But why are people so suspicious of their leaders? One possibility is that “power corrupts” and therefore people are right in their reservations. Indeed, there are numerous examples of unethical leadership, even at the highest level, as the Watergate and Enron scandals clearly illustrate. Another possibility is that people are unjustifiably paranoid, as underscored by some of the rather far-fetched conspiracy theories that are endorsed by a surprisingly large number of citizens. Are societal power holders more likely than the average citizen to display unethical behavior? How do people generally think and feel about politicians? How do paranoia and conspiracy beliefs about societal power holders originate? In this book, prominent scholars address these intriguing questions and illuminate the many facets of the relations between power, politics, and paranoia.

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Power, Politics, and Paranoia

Why People Are Suspicious of Their Leaders

Edited by

Jan-Willem van Prooijen and Paul A. M. van Lange



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Preface

Leadership is an indispensable element of a smoothly operating society. We need political and corporate leaders to make important decisions that have a strong and lasting impact on our job prospects, our health, our safety, and our well-being. It therefore comes as no surprise that societal leaders are closely monitored by the media, and are continuously being evaluated by citizens. What is striking, though, is that many citizens seem uncomfortable with such societal power holders. This is reflected in the negative and suspicious remarks that can be frequently overheard in everyday discourse, assuming, for instance, that most politicians have a corrupt hidden agenda, or that most chief executive officers (CEOs) are heartlessly driven by financial self-interest without much regard for the collective interest or the well-being of their employees. Moreover, conspiracy theories abound about illegal secret activities of leaders, as, for instance, reflected in statistics revealing that large numbers of people believe that President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in a political conspiracy involving elements of the US government, or that the 9/11 terrorist strikes were an “inside job.” All in all, many people have little confidence in the societal leaders that they depend on.

It is important to find out how such distrust and suspiciousness emerge, and whether it is rooted in actual immoral behavior by power holders, in overly paranoid perceptions among citizens, or both. Does having power influence how unethically a leader is inclined to behave? Is a person’s moral compass predictive of the likelihood that he or she will rise to power? If one can establish such a link between power and immorality, it may have substantial implications for how society should select and monitor its leaders. Are the negative perceptions of citizens towards leaders always justified? How often are citizens paranoid, perceiving immoral behaviors and evil conspiracies when in fact there are none? The less trust the public has in societal leaders, the more difficult it will be for those leaders to function effectively. This may hamper the collective interest, particularly in times of crisis. The importance of these issues is underscored by the enormous attention that researchers within the social

sciences have devoted to understanding the dynamics associated with the influence of power on people's behaviors and cognitions, as well as the origins of distrustful and paranoid perceptions among citizens.

The "power, politics, and paranoia" project was largely inspired by the observation that many people tend to be rather suspicious of societal leaders. This observation energized numerous thoughts that are nicely captured by the idea of power, politics, and paranoia. For example, some would argue that "power corrupts," that "power and politics often go hand in hand," and that "paranoia" – defined as suspicious beliefs about the evil nature of others' intentions and behaviors – may be a result of such processes. There is also state-of-the-art research on each of these topics. For example, some scholars investigate the extent to which power is predictive of unethical or norm-violating behavior. Others look at how citizens' distrust, paranoia, and conspiracy beliefs emerge in situations where such negative perceptions may be unwarranted. We wanted to capture both sides of the coin as we were deeply interested in illuminating these important issues. Indeed, we felt that these issues are important from a scientific perspective, and that a fuller understanding of them would involve a number of fields and disciplines closely related to psychology and political science. And, as alluded to earlier, we felt that the issues of power, politics, and paranoia are at the heart of societal well-being. How can societies function well if people do not trust their leaders? How can organizations pursue their goals if the leaders are mistrusted?

The next step was to write a grant proposal in which we proposed not only research but also an international conference that would help us further understand the delicate and fragile trust relation between societal power holders and citizens. The conference was held in July 2012 in Amsterdam, and attracted a range of international speakers, who approached this topic from various angles. Some time before the conference, we decided to edit a book on these issues. We approached prominent scholars working in various countries (such as Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, New Zealand, the USA, and the UK) to contribute a chapter, and received many encouraging reactions. These reactions not only confirmed our enthusiasm as such but also strengthened our conviction of the scientific and societal relevance of power, politics, and paranoia across a number of disciplines. We feel greatly indebted to these scholars, whose efforts to summarize their thoughts and ideas about the relations between power, politics, and paranoia in a chapter made the idea for this book a reality.

Besides all the scholars who contributed a chapter, we feel we should express our gratitude to various other people who have been of invaluable assistance. First of all, we wish to thank Hetty Marx of Cambridge University Press, who expressed enthusiasm for the book idea from the

very start, and with whom we had a very pleasant collaboration throughout the project. We also thank Sarah Green, Joanna Breeze, Jonathan Ratcliffe, Carrie Parkinson, and Rebecca Taylor of Cambridge University Press for their help during various phases of the project. Furthermore, we acknowledge the Dutch National Science Foundation (NWO), for the financial support to start our investigation of political paranoia, which eventually resulted in the conference and in this book (NWO Conflict and Security grant W.07.68.103.00). Finally, we thank Nils Jostmann and Joel Vuolevi for their contributions especially to the research that followed from this grant.

Power, politics, and paranoia are omnipresent. A book that seeks to understand and integrate these topics should be interesting to many people who enjoy being informed about the dynamics of political and corporate leadership. Beside the general interest, we think the book might be especially informative to students and scientists with an empirical or theoretical interest in the workings of power, politics, and paranoia in these domains. We also believe that practitioners might benefit from many of the chapters, as they deal with issues that are clearly relevant to how leaders should optimally behave and communicate in politics and organizations to develop strategies and attain important collective goals. Indeed, newspapers tell us all too often that political and organizational leadership is in need of considerable improvement and refinement. After all, small changes in leadership can bring about big effects. Whether your goal is empirical, theoretical, societal, or any combination, we hope that you as a reader will appreciate the many insights that this book has to offer, and that you will be as fascinated as we are about the intriguing relations between power, politics, and paranoia.

1 Power, politics, and paranoia: an introduction

Jan-Willem van Prooijen and Paul A. M. van Lange

Being a powerful leader is not an easy task in our modern age. Political leaders have the major responsibility of making decisions in the collective interest in the context of economic and financial crises, climate change, poverty, immigration, the threat of terrorism, and war. Corporate leaders must navigate their organization's interest through increasingly fluctuating markets, changing customer demands, and rapid technological developments. The decision-making that takes place in these situations typically has to be negotiated with multiple parties that have different interests, often leading to heated debates and difficult compromises. Many of the resulting decisions have complex moral and financial implications, can potentially have unpredictable consequences, and must be made under substantial time pressure. Moreover, the actions of societal leaders are under continuous public scrutiny. Political leaders are closely monitored by the media, while being praised and criticized by followers, opponents, opinion makers, and other citizens. Corporate leaders are accountable to stakeholders, policymakers, employees, and sometimes also the general public. Yet, the consequences of these powerful leaders' decisions are immense, as they directly impact the life of many citizens in terms of jobs, income, well-being, and health.

Citizens thus depend substantially on the quality of their leaders' decisions, which are made in a challenging and error-prone environment. This raises the question of how citizens cope with the power that leaders within our society have over their lives, and to what extent they are willing to accord them the trust and legitimacy that is needed for them to function effectively as decision-makers (Tyler, 1997). One striking notion is that citizens often respond with suspicion of the morality of the actions and motives of their leaders. One indication for such suspicion is the volatility, polarization, and extremism that can be observed throughout the European Union (EU) and the USA. Due to recent scandals in the media pertaining to societal leaders (e.g., bonuses for managers; bank crashes), there is a substantial public awareness of the possibility of a failing political and economic system. As a consequence, people

frequently accuse leaders of secret, immoral – and sometimes even criminal – activities, as can be observed in the variety and widespread appeal of the conspiracy beliefs that many people endorse when trying to make sense of distressing societal events (e.g., Robins and Post, 1997; Sunstein and Vermeule, 2009). Moreover, according to the global Edelman Trust Barometer 2013,¹ government officials are considered to be the least credible spokespeople throughout the world, and although there is substantial variation both within and between countries, trust in politicians tends, on average, to be low in absolute terms (see also Andeweg, this volume). Moreover, corporate leaders – such as CEOs – are also not considered to be very trustworthy according to this global survey. Still, such distrust clearly is not universal, as many leaders have a remarkable capacity of motivating, inspiring, and mobilizing large groups of people (Bass and Riggio, 2006).

Inspired by these observations, the present edited volume seeks to address the following general question: Why, and under what conditions, are people suspicious of their leaders? There is no simple or straightforward answer to this question. At the same time, we believe that suspicious beliefs about leaders can be better understood by appreciating the intense research efforts of many prominent scholars throughout the social and behavioral sciences. In various disciplines, academic researchers investigate hypotheses pertaining to relevant topics, such as the effects of power on perception and behavior, how the powerless perceive the powerful, unethical decision-making, trust and distrust, corruption, paranoia, and scapegoating. We therefore asked various prominent scholars within the social and behavioral sciences who have relevant research expertise – and are hence able to provide a unique and insightful perspective on this topic – to contribute a chapter representing their core ideas and findings. In integrating the thoughts and ideas of these scholars into the present book, our aim is to provide academics, students, and practitioners with a comprehensive and current overview of theorizing on power, politics, and paranoia, which may hopefully inspire further theoretical integration, empirical research, and societal application. In the following, we describe the purpose of this book in greater detail by illuminating the origins of suspiciousness towards leaders.

The origins of suspiciousness towards leaders

To answer the general question of why people often are suspicious of their leaders, it may be illustrative to first examine how distrust emerges

¹ <http://trust.edelman.com/>

in a simple dyadic social structure. Suppose in any given social situation that a random actor A (e.g., a citizen) is suspicious of how well intended the actions and motives are of a random actor B (e.g., a leader). This suspiciousness can have at least two possible origins. The first possibility is that the origins of this suspiciousness can be found in the actions of actor B. Actor B may behave in a way that is considered deceptive, manipulative, selfish, or otherwise unreliable by most people. In other words, actor A may be correctly suspicious, as actor B behaves in a way that can and should not be trusted. The second possibility, however, is that the origins of this suspiciousness may be found in the way actor A perceives, feels, or processes information about actor B. Actor A may interpret the ambiguous behavior of B more negatively than B intended in so behaving, a phenomenon that is closely related to errors in attributional processes such as the hostile attribution bias and the related sinister attribution bias (Kramer, 1998). In other words, actor A may be paranoid and misinterpret the good intentions of actor B.

If we extrapolate this simple dyadic structure to the current discussion, the answer to the question of why people are suspicious of their leaders can be summarized as two broad possibilities: (1) leaders on average are less trustworthy than followers, and citizens are right to be suspicious; versus (2) citizens exaggerate their distrust of their leaders, and thus a lot of suspicious feelings are driven by paranoid cognitions among citizens. It is important to recognize that these two possibilities are not mutually exclusive. Powerful people may be less likely than powerless people to be trustworthy, but, at the same time, the power holders that *are* trustworthy may not always be correctly perceived as such by their followers. To fully understand people's suspiciousness towards their leaders, it is necessary to closely investigate both possibilities, while challenging common assumptions that laypeople and scientists sometimes have.

To examine these issues, the book is divided into three complementary parts. Part I – “power” – explores the possibility that power holders are less trustworthy than people who lack power. There are abundant examples of corrupt – even “evil” – power holders in history. At the same time, it must be recognized that such examples of corrupt power holders do not empirically prove that power corrupts, or that corrupt individuals are more likely to rise to power. As noted by Smith and Overbeck (this volume), the actions of power holders are more noticeable – and hence their negative actions are more salient – than if committed by someone who lacks power. In other words, drawing the conclusion that power corrupts based on everyday life examples of corrupt power holders alone is not hard evidence, and may be subject to biased perceptual processes (e.g., the illusory correlation). Moreover, there are also many power

holders in everyday life who are moral authorities, suggesting that if there is a relation between power and unethical behavior, it certainly is not a straightforward and simple one. What is needed, therefore, is a fine-grained analysis of empirical research that statistically tests whether or not, and under what conditions, power holders are more likely to behave unethically than people who lack power. Four chapters examine these complex relations between power and ethical versus unethical decision-making.

Part II – “politics” – explores the dynamics of distrust and power specifically in the political realm. The decisions made by political leaders influence a large group of people, leading politicians to be a category of power holder that has the potential of being viewed with a lot of suspicion in societal discourse. Political leaders thus constitute a prototypical category of power holder that is frequently distrusted by followers, as underscored by the Trust Barometer findings. We included a section in the book that is specifically focused on examining the question of how trust in and distrust of political leaders originate and are perpetuated. In five chapters, scholars assess citizens’ suspicious perceptions of political leaders from various angles. Specifically, the chapters address issues such as what stereotypes people tend to hold about politicians, how distrust of politicians emerges among disadvantaged groups in society, why citizens sometimes are willing to grant enormous power to political leaders (e.g., authoritarian regimes), why people sometimes endorse leaders who display clear signs of corruption (i.e., the Italian case of Berlusconi), and whether or not the “confidence gap” (i.e., the extent to which citizens distrust politicians) has widened in recent decades.

Part III – “paranoia” – investigates the psychological processes that lead people to be overly suspicious of power holders. A large portion of the population of Western countries believes in various conspiracy theories, and these numbers are too large to be accounted for by clinical forms of paranoia (Robins and Post, 1997; Sunstein and Vermeule, 2009). Indeed, it has been noted that paranoid cognition is a frequently occurring aspect of interpersonal perception in everyday life (Kramer, 1998). Moreover, although some conspiracy theories have turned out to be true (e.g., the Watergate scandal; the Iran-Contra affair), the majority of conspiracy theories have turned out to be false (Pipes, 1997). In fact, people’s paranoid beliefs about societal leaders tend to suffer from internal inconsistencies. Research indicates that beliefs in mutually exclusive conspiracy theories – such as the belief that Princess Diana was assassinated versus the belief that she staged her own death – are positively correlated (Wood, Douglas, and Sutton, 2012). This illustrates that it is impossible for all suspicious beliefs that people hold about their

leaders to be true; hence, a substantial portion of these beliefs can only be misplaced paranoia. In six chapters, scholars examine the psychological underpinnings of paranoid cognition, conspiracy beliefs, political enemyship, and scapegoating. We now more elaborately introduce each part in turn.

Part I – power

One of the editors of this book (van Prooijen) actively investigates belief in conspiracy theories, and has commented on this topic various times in the Dutch media. As a result, he sometimes receives email correspondence from Dutch citizens who are strongly suspicious of power holders and endorse a range of conspiracy theories. The messages vary substantially in reasoning sophistication and politeness (as does the corresponding likelihood of being replied to), but the overarching question is typically the same: “Did you ever consider the possibility that we are right to be suspicious, and that most leaders actually cannot be trusted?” The question is usually posed rhetorically, as if scientists never thought of that possibility. Admittedly, both editors are highly skeptical of most of the rather grandiose conspiracy theories that can be found on the internet. But at the same time, the underlying question whether or not there is a link between power and unethical behavior is a fair one, and one that can be tested empirically.

Power is typically conceptualized and defined as control over other people’s outcomes (Fiske, 1993). Almost by definition, this implies that power holders have opportunities to exploit such outcome control for their own benefit. In other words, power creates the potential for power abuse, and corruption is common in all societies, including modern Western democracies (Graycar and Smith, 2011). Indeed, since the seminal publication of Kipnis (1972) on the question of whether or not power corrupts, decades of research have explored the influence of power on – for instance – perspective taking (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi *et al.*, 2006), stereotyping (Fiske, 1993), ethical decision-making (Blader and Chen, 2012), hypocrisy (Lammers, Stapel, and Galinsky, 2010), disinhibition (Hirsch, Galinsky, and Zong, 2011), and overconfidence (Fast, Sivanathan, Mayer *et al.*, 2012).

It is not hard to find examples of leaders who turned out not to be worthy of the public’s trust, in both the political and corporate world. Richard Nixon’s personal involvement in the Watergate affair underscores that even at the highest political office people are not immune to the temptation of unethical decision-making and corruption. The Enron CEOs, blinded by greed, committed extensive fraud by exaggerating the

company's profits and embezzling millions of dollars, eventually leading to the Enron bankruptcy. Bernard Madoff, chairman of one of the leading market-maker businesses on Wall Street, robbed thousands of people of their life savings with his fraudulent Ponzi scheme before being exposed as a conman. These are misdeeds of a highly immoral nature, even after we recognize that they are only minor infractions compared to the actions of powerful leaders who committed large-scale atrocities (Hitler, Stalin).

But one cannot draw solid conclusions about the relation between power and unethical behavior based only on examples and anecdotes of immoral leaders. Many other leaders in history have been characterized by a high sense of morality and an admirable concern for the well-being and life circumstances of others. Mahatma Gandhi was the major leader of the Indian struggle for independence, which he managed to achieve through peaceful and violence-free resistance to the oppression of his people. Nelson Mandela spent much of his adult life in prison due to his opposition to the perverse system of apartheid, but he had the incredible capacity to forgive the very people who had incarcerated him once he was elected president of South Africa. Finally, the highly successful corporate leader Bill Gates has donated more money to charity in recent years than most EU countries did. Thus both moral and immoral societal leaders abound. What does the empirical evidence tell us about the relation between power and unethical behavior?

The contribution by Lammers and van Beest ([Chapter 2](#)) addresses the effects of power on selfish and corrupt behavior. The chapter reveals that, at least under certain conditions, power leads people to feel entitled to take more than their fair share from a pool of scarce resources, and to compromise less in negotiations. Moreover, the authors suggest that power can corrupt for various reasons, such as its disinhibiting effects. These insights are complemented by correlational findings among societal power holders (e.g., CEOs), revealing that power is associated with increased disinhibition, overrewarding of the self, and an increased likelihood of infidelity in close relationships.

These insights are further expanded upon in the contribution by Stamkou and Van Kleef ([Chapter 3](#)). They note that not only does power increase the prevalence of norm violations but also that actors who display certain forms of norm-violating behavior lead others to ascribe power to them – and this may fuel power affordances. Interestingly, such power affordances are fueled only by prosocial norm violations – that is, norm violations intended to benefit others – not by selfish norm violations. The authors discuss the implications of these findings in terms of how the relation between norm violations and power affordances may be influenced

by culture, as well as how norm violations may reinforce a hierarchical social structure through power affordances.

Chapter 4 by Smith and Overbeck challenges the notion that power necessarily corrupts, and these authors highlight the positive effects of power. They describe that although power may corrupt sometimes, the evidence for these negative effects of power is much more mixed than is commonly assumed, and power frequently has positive effects such as increased individuation, communal relations, and prosocial behavior. Moreover, Smith and Overbeck provide evidence that – at least sometimes, and possibly much more frequently than is recognized by scientists and laypeople – people perceive power holders as *more* moral and *less* corrupt than others. They then discuss the implications of these findings for putting the right people into powerful positions.

Finally, Chapter 5 by Sassenberg, Ellemers, Scheepers, and Scholl notes that power can be construed in two ways: (1) as opportunity to reach one's own goals, and (2) as responsibility for others. They review evidence that power corrupts only if people construe it as opportunity, but not if they construe it as responsibility. However, Sassenberg and colleagues also reveal that the construal of power as opportunity is more attractive – and hence more likely to instigate strivings for power – than the construal of power as responsibility in Western cultures. These authors then discuss how culture and context determine how people construe power, and what the implications of these dynamics are for corruption.

Part II – politics

Part II on “politics” addresses suspicious perceptions in the context of a specific type of leader – namely, politicians. This is in all likelihood the category of leadership that is most visible and debated in our society. Not only are politicians closely monitored by popular media, but also the decisions made by politicians have an impact on the employment, financial status, health, and general well-being of many people. Moreover, sometimes politicians have to make decisions that they believe to be necessary for the long-term collective interest, but that are clearly painful and negative to the specific short-term interests of various groups of people. The benefits of such decisions are typically disputed by opposing parties. Politicians thus are frequently associated with unpopular and debated decisions, and, as a consequence, it is likely that politicians often are target of substantial distrust, paranoid reactions, and conspiracy beliefs.

Ironically, political leaders are presumably also the category of leaders who are most in need of trust by their followers. How long political

leaders manage to stay in office depends strongly on the trust that they are accorded by citizens. Although all leaders benefit from the trust of their followers (Tyler, 1997), this does not match up to the case of politicians whose re-election depends in a directly linear fashion on how trustworthy they are perceived to be. This suggests an interesting paradox: Citizens on average have little trust in politicians, but the same citizens have the capacity to elect those same politicians to office in modern representative democracies. It is, of course, likely that those who did not vote for a certain elected political leader are highly suspicious of that leader. It has been noted that the political left is notoriously suspicious of the political right, and vice versa (Inglehart, 1987). But an additional possibility is that trust in specific politicians and political parties is fragile. These considerations suggest interesting dynamics pertaining to suspicious perceptions of political leaders, which deserve an in-depth analysis. The five chapters in the “politics” part of this volume provide such an analysis.

In the first chapter of the “politics” part, Fiske and Durante (Chapter 6) analyze the contents of the stereotypes that people endorse about politicians. In a variety of countries, people evaluated how the category of politicians maps on the stereotype dimensions of warmth and competence. The competence that people ascribe to politicians varies by country, but in all countries investigated, people placed politicians at the “cold” part of the warmth dimension – insincere, dishonest, “not-us.” These evaluations can be accounted for by the various negative emotions that politicians elicit, as well as by the interdependence structure that characterizes a politician–voter relationship. Fiske and Durante conclude by discussing how relational accountability may regulate trust among voters.

In Chapter 7, Bou Zeineddine and Pratto note that distrust among the disadvantaged is inherent to asymmetrical power structures due to a heightened sense of vulnerability and uncertainty whether one’s needs will be met. Applying this insight to the context of political distrust, these authors note that disadvantaged groups in modern societies increasingly experience a sense of empowerment to strive for better guarantees regarding the extent to which their basic needs are met. As such, an increased empowerment of the disadvantaged, in combination with a failure of authorities to address their needs, may increase political distrust. In concluding, they discuss the potential positive and negative effects that this distrust may have on emancipatory values, democracy, and social progress.

Chapter 8 by Haller and Hogg addresses the question of why citizens sometimes are willing to accord extreme levels of power to political

leaders. They note that, particularly in times of crisis and uncertainty, people desire strong and directive leadership. Building on social identity theory, uncertainty-identity theory, and the social identity theory of leadership, they note that uncertainty increases identification with groups and the desire for a prototypical leader. Extreme uncertainty, however, may lead people to particularly identify with groups that are highly entitative, with simple prototypes and a rigid hierarchy. As a consequence, extremely uncertain societal circumstances may motivate people to endorse leaders that are extreme, ideologically rigid, and authoritarian. These insights contribute to the important question of how many authoritarian regimes of the twentieth century could rise to power.

Chapter 9 by Chirumbolo and Leone then addresses a counterintuitive but real phenomenon: Why do many people sometimes vote for political leaders that are quite explicitly associated with immoral conduct and corruption? They specifically focus on the Italian case of Berlusconi, who throughout the years has received substantial support from voters, and has been elected prime minister multiple times, despite official corruption charges, court trials, and other (e.g., sex) scandals. Chirumbolo and Leone then analyze the sociopolitical attitudes, values, and personality, of citizens who voted for Berlusconi, and develop a profile of people who continually support this controversial leader.

Finally, in Chapter 10 by Andeweg, the author notes that there seems to be a confidence gap in the EU – referring to the distrust that citizens display in political parties and politicians – but challenges the frequently held assumption that the confidence gap between citizens and politicians has *widened* in recent decades. This author analyzes longitudinal data about political trust in many EU countries to determine whether there is any evidence for a widening confidence gap. The data reveal that although trust in political parties and politicians tends to be low in absolute terms, there is no evidence for a widening confidence gap. Changes in trust over time seem to be fluctuations rather than trends, and vary substantially between and (particularly) within countries. Andeweg concludes that despite the tenacity of such a belief, the widening of the confidence gap may be as real as the Loch Ness Monster.

Part III – paranoia

The final part of the book – on “paranoia” – seeks to explain the fact that many citizens hold suspicious beliefs about leaders that arguably are far-fetched, or at least inconsistent with other suspicious beliefs that are endorsed by the same perceivers (Wood *et al.*, 2012). On many internet sites one can find conspiracy theories about (for instance) NASA

faking the Moon landings, the Bush government orchestrating the attacks on 9/11, or climate change being a hoax imposed on citizens to attain some evil goal. Despite the superhuman level of power, organizational skill, and malevolent intent that these theories sometimes assume, a substantial proportion of the human population believes in, or at least takes seriously, many such theories (Robins and Post, 1997; Sunstein and Vermeule, 2009; see also Swami and Furnham, this volume; van Prooijen and van Lange, this volume). The prevalence of such suspicious beliefs suggests that political paranoia serves some psychological function for perceivers. Indeed, various authors have noted that paranoid social cognition, as well as belief in conspiracy theories, serves the mental function of regulating uncertainty by making sense of distressing societal events (e.g., Hofstadter, 1966; Kramer, 1998; Whitson and Galinsky, 2008). In a related fashion, it has been noted that people attribute increased power to their enemies to regulate uncertainty; after all, one can understand, and anticipate, the actions of a recognizable immoral agent (Sullivan, Landau, and Rothschild, 2010). These arguments illustrate that paranoid social cognition, conspiracy beliefs, perceived enmity, and scapegoating may be grounded in the normal underlying psychological processes of seeking control and trying to make sense of the world.

Although paranoid beliefs may be psychologically functional for perceivers, one may wonder how functional such beliefs are for others in the social environment and society at large. It is conceivable that being skeptical and vigilant about the actions of powerful people or groups is adaptive as it might make citizens less vulnerable to exploitation while increasing power holders' sense of accountability for their actions. Moreover, a certain amount of distrust may provide impetus to social change and the development of emancipatory values (Bou Zeineddine and Pratto, this volume). But *exaggerated* distrust and suspicion are likely to be a reason for concern, for various reasons. First, deteriorated relations between leaders and followers undermine the legitimacy that leaders need for good governance (Tyler, 1997). Indeed, empirical research reveals that conspiracy beliefs decrease people's intention to engage in politics (Jolley and Douglas, in press). Moreover, conspiracy beliefs can lead people to make bad choices that influence important life outcomes, such as their health (e.g., Swami and Furnham, this volume; Thornburn and Bogart, 2005). Finally, there is the serious danger of the interpersonal and intergroup conflict, hate crime, and violence that may emerge from these paranoid beliefs. Taking this latter issue to the extreme, historical records suggest that many of the major atrocities in the twentieth century were substantially fueled by paranoid beliefs about other groups. For instance, one of the core beliefs underlying the Holocaust was that

Jewish people were conspiring to achieve world domination, as through communism (Midlarsky, 2011; Pipes, 1999). Likewise, many people in communist regimes were killed because of their alleged connection to the West, which made them potential enemies of the state or spies. Although one might note that these tragedies were rather extreme, and presumably grounded in extreme paranoia, they nevertheless underscore the dramatic consequences that suspicious beliefs about other peoples or groups can potentially have.

In the first chapter (11) of the “paranoia” part, Kramer and Schaffer address the origins of out-group paranoia, which they conceptualize as extreme suspicion and distrust between groups in the context of the hierarchical trust dilemma. Such dilemmas are characterized by asymmetries in the level of power and dependence between groups. Kramer and Schaffer then present a model of how, in these dilemmas, perceptions of vulnerability and threat elicit psychological processes that ultimately lead to out-group paranoia. Through hypervigilance and dysphoric rumination, three specific forms of intergroup misperception may emerge that contribute to such out-group paranoia – namely, the overly personalistic construal of intergroup interactions, the sinister attribution bias, and the exaggerated perception of conspiracy.

In Chapter 12, Swami and Furnham examine the roots of conspiracy theories. They first conceptualize and define what a conspiracy theory is, after which they review sociological and psychological research that has examined this phenomenon. Specifically, they argue that, much like other belief systems, conspiracy theories fill a need for certainty, control, and understanding, offering a coherent account of events that are otherwise difficult to understand. Furthermore, Swami and Furnham review the psychological processes that contribute to conspiracy beliefs, such as the fundamental attribution error, attitude or group polarization, and various personality and individual differences. They conclude their chapter by discussing the implications of conspiracy beliefs for societal and political functioning.

Chapter 13 by van Prooijen and van Lange seeks to illuminate the social dimension of belief in conspiracy theories. They argue that most conspiracy beliefs are an intergroup phenomenon that follows from the perception that an out-group is threatening one’s in-group. This distinguishes conspiracy beliefs in important ways from interpersonal paranoia, which is characterized by a belief that others are trying to harm a perceiver personally. Van Prooijen and van Lange then present evidence for the proposition that conspiracy beliefs are fueled by feelings of rejection by a powerful out-group, as well as a strong feeling of being connected to one’s in-group. Their conclusion is that conspiracy beliefs

can be meaningfully conceptualized as the result of perceived intergroup threat.

In [Chapter 14](#), Sutton and Douglas examine the monological nature of conspiracy beliefs. Specifically, they pose the question of why people who believe in one conspiracy theory are more likely to also believe another conspiracy theory. The dominant explanation for this phenomenon is that conspiracy beliefs are part of a monological belief system, characterized by closed-mindedness and a nomothetic explanatory style. Sutton and Douglas review a range of situational and personality variables that predict conspiracy beliefs, and consider the implications of the available evidence for the idea that conspiracy beliefs are part of a monological mind-set. They conclude that at present there is insufficient evidence to prove that conspiracy beliefs are indeed monological in nature, and that there are alternative mechanisms that may explain the strong correlations between different conspiracy beliefs.

[Chapter 15](#) by Wilson and Rose focuses on political and cultural explanations to explain belief in conspiracy theories. Using a dual-process motivational framework, they explain how paranoia, on the one hand, and the sociopolitical variables of right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO), on the other hand, can predict belief in conspiracy theories. They note that people who score high on RWA more easily see social events as a threat to security, while people who score high on SDO more easily see social events as a threat to hierarchy, either of which factors may independently stimulate conspiracy beliefs. In addition, Wilson and colleagues present recent research findings on the relation between paranoia, RWA, SDO, and conspiracy beliefs.

In the final chapter ([16](#)), Sullivan, Landau, Rothschild, and Keefer examine the existential roots of political enemyship, and the related construct of scapegoating. They theorize that the perception of having personal and political enemies allows individuals to maintain a sense of personal control and a valued identity. Using insights derived from terror-management theory, Sullivan and colleagues note that enemyship serves four existential functions: death denial, identity maintenance, control maintenance, and guilt denial. They review the evidence for these four existential functions of enemyship, and supplement their existential theory of enemyship with sociological insights that specify how social constructions of enemies imbue them with certain characteristics. Moreover, they delineate under which social circumstances enemyship and scapegoating are generally likely to occur, and how social circumstances can predict qualitative variation in the specific enemyship and scapegoating phenomena that may arise.

Closing remarks

To return to the broader issue of why people sometimes are suspicious of their leaders, many people in everyday life occasionally encounter a corrupt leader, and many people occasionally may be paranoid. The question, however, is not whether corrupt leadership or political paranoia occurs, but, rather, whether there exist behavioral and cognitive regularities in these phenomena that can be scientifically predicted, explained, and modified. The present book addresses this issue in the context of current research on topics related to power, politics, and paranoia. It is our hope that the chapters in the present volume may inspire researchers and practitioners in their efforts to establish or maintain morally responsible and effective governance which is accountable to a public that is characterized by a constructively critical mind-set without displaying excessive paranoia.

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Part I

Power

2 The effects of power on immorality

Joris Lammers and Ilja van Beest

In almost all modern democracies, many citizens feel alienated from politics. They lack confidence in politicians and experience a “gap” between their own reality as citizens and the reality that politicians move in. They distrust politicians and lack confidence in their ability to deal with what they see as the most important issues of today (e.g., Bynner and Ashford, 1994; Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki, 1975; Kabashima, Marshall, Uekami *et al.*, 2000; Lipset and Schneider, 1983; Norris, 1999; Nye, Zelikow, and King, 1997; Pharr and Putnam, 2000; Pharr, Putnam, and Dalton, 2000; for a meta-analysis, see Dalton, 1999). To be clear, this lack of trust and confidence does not mean that people favor the introduction of fascism, communism, or any other nondemocratic form of government (Kaase and Newton, 1995; Norris, 1999). It is also not specifically directed towards those politicians who happen to rule at this moment; turning current politicians out and electing new ones does not restore this lack of confidence (Andeweg, 1996). Rather, what seems to underlie this lack of trust and confidence is a general gloom and pessimism about politicians. It is felt that the attention of politicians is aimed at people’s votes and not their interests or opinions. As soon as politicians are elected, they forget about their voters.

There may be many explanations for this lack of confidence. For example, one explanation may be that the mass media has become more and more sensational and focused on private scandals. Another explanation may be that society’s increasing complexity makes it relatively hard to discern any positive impact of current government, leading to a perception that politicians lack either the willingness or the ability to bring about any real changes. But the present book focuses on a different, perhaps more fundamental, explanation, and aims to investigate whether people lack confidence in their leaders simply because they are fundamentally suspicious about people with power – such as politicians. Such suspicion of powerful people is not new – in fact, it is recurrent across the centuries. In the Athenian democracy of the fourth century BC, Plato (1998) had already observed that whatever politicians gained in power they lost in

morality. Plato believed that power almost necessarily leads to corruption, selfishness, and dishonesty. In fact, according to him, this link from power to corruption was so strong that it could only be broken by special training. Since then, Plato's dim view of power has often been echoed – interestingly, even by people who have had first-hand experience of having power, such as Marcus Aurelius (writing in AD 167) (1989), Leo Tolstoy (1935/1894), or Lord Acton (1972/1887), who coined the adage, “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

By virtue of use and repetition, Lord Acton's words and – more generally – the idea that power undermines the fundamentals of morality have almost reached the status of a universal truth, the veracity so much beyond doubt that questioning it would only demonstrate one's naivety. After all, hardly a day goes by without some scandal or misbehavior among the more powerful of our society. Think of Silvio Berlusconi's *bunga bunga* sex parties with underage girls, Bernard Madoff's Ponzi scheme, or Richard Nixon's bugging of the Democratic Party headquarters at the Watergate Hotel. In fact, such scandals follow each other so quickly that some wonder how politicians find the time to govern. Time and again, we hear of powerful people with an important function who violate the most basic norms, principles, and values of our society and who seem to feel entitled to place themselves beyond the rules that govern mere mortals.

But anecdotes and observations alone – even if made by Plato or Tolstoy – do not prove that power indeed corrupts. It may very well be that we often hear about sex scandals among politicians and other powerful people simply because the powerful are followed more closely by the media. If John Doe holds a sex party it is not news; if Berlusconi does, it is. It may also be that power is by itself not a corrupting force – to follow Lord Acton – but that it merely attracts the corruptible. Perhaps those who are interested in immorality are more likely to be attracted to a powerful position. The aim of the present chapter is therefore to give an overview of empirical research on the link between power and corruption, to test the truth of Lord Acton's adage.

The research that we discuss studies the effects of power not by looking at the behavior of politicians and powerful people, but by looking at ordinary people. This research assumes that if power has general corruptive effects, then even “ordinary” people, such as students or average citizens, should show essentially the same corrupt behaviors whenever they have power – although perhaps in a more diluted form.

In discussing this research on power, we make one fundamental distinction – namely, that between positions of power and feelings of power. Positions of power occur when people have more control over an

outcome. For example, they have more control over negotiations. But positions of power also bring feelings of power. People who are regularly in a powerful role may start to see themselves differently. They start to have persistent feelings of power. Such feelings also affect behavior. As we will argue, a key difference is that positions of power bring considerations on how to use that power, while feelings of power do not necessarily do so. We will first discuss research into positions of power.

Positions of power

The effects of positions of power are often studied by using an experimental game paradigm. Typically, researchers using this paradigm ask participants to play a game in which they can obtain or win something – money, for example. Often they do so by negotiating with another party. In game theory, researchers then study how changing some of the parameters of that game affects players' choices. When studying power, the parameter of interest is control. If one player has more control over his own or others' outcomes, this player can be said to have a more powerful position.

Within this paradigm, the most basic conclusion is that if players lack power in a negotiation, they are more likely to give in to the other party. For example, De Dreu (1995) conducted a study in which he had players negotiate with an opponent (who, in reality, was played by a computer), and he manipulated the power of those players versus their opponents by manipulating the ability of both parties to hurt the other party. Both parties were told they had the ability to lower the other party's assets (a form of coercive power), but, crucially, this ability differed between conditions. Some players could lower the other party's assets only a bit (by 20%), while other players read in the instructions of the experiment that they could lower it substantially (by 50%) or greatly (by 80%). Furthermore, participants also read that their opponent could lower their assets. Again, some read that their assets could be lowered by 20%, while others read that they could be lowered by 50% or 80%. Hence, the coercive power of the players and of their opponents was manipulated independently. The results showed that concession making mainly depended on the perceived coercive power of the opponent. If participants thought that their opponents had a lot of coercive power, they made lower demands.

Handgraaf, van Dijk, Vermunt *et al.* (2008) reported somewhat similar findings – albeit with an interesting twist. In the first place, they relied on a different way to manipulate power. Specifically, they had participants play a negotiation game, in which they were asked to distribute 100 chips that in total were worth about \$5, between themselves and a recipient.

This recipient could either accept this distribution or reject it. The crucial manipulation involved what the consequences were in case of rejection. In one condition, rejection would mean that neither party would receive anything. In this condition, the participant and recipient did not differ much in their power over outcomes. After all, although participants could propose a very unequal distribution (for example, \$1 for the recipient and \$4 for themselves), the recipient would most likely find this unfair and reject it, leaving both parties with nothing. The participants should therefore stay close to an equal distribution. Accordingly, participants offered on average to give about \$2.39 to the recipient and kept \$2.61 themselves.

Three other conditions demonstrated this by manipulating the consequences of rejection by the recipient. Specifically, in a second condition, participants were told that if the recipient rejected the offer, the participant would still receive 10% of the offer. In this case they reduced their offer by 23 cents, from \$2.39 to \$2.16. Stated differently, if participants were less dependent on the recipient's decision – in other words, if they had more power – then they proposed to keep more money for themselves and proposed to share less money with the recipient. It therefore should not be surprising that participants in a third condition, who were told that rejection would mean that they would still receive 90% of the offer, offered a mere \$1.80 (keeping for themselves \$3.20). These participants had almost complete control over the outcome and were almost completely independent of the decision of the recipient.

Crucially, however, participants in a fourth condition were told that the decision of the recipient would not affect the distribution at all. That is, the participant's distribution was always followed, independent of the recipient's decision to accept or reject. Or, in other words, rejection would mean that they received 100% of the offer. This position may be seen as one of omnipotence; the participant has complete control over the outcome and is completely independent of the decisions of the recipient. Note that in this condition, economic rationality would predict that the participants would propose a "distribution" in which they would get all of the \$5 and the recipient would get nothing. But Handgraaf and colleagues found that, on average, participants still gave \$2.22. Note that this is descriptively more – not less – than the \$1.80 they offered if they had almost complete (90%) control over the outcomes.

Handgraaf and colleagues explained this finding by noting that if people are in an omnipotent position feelings of care take over. People no longer try to get the best possible deal and force the opponent into accepting a low offer, but rather experience a sense of *noblesse oblige*. The authors therefore conclude that only the first part of Lord Acton's

statement is true – not the second. Power corrupts – in the sense at least that it makes people more selfish – but absolute power produces care and compassion.

Focusing on another aspect of immoral behavior than outright force, Koning, Steinel, van Beest *et al.* (2011) asked whether power can also increase people's inclination to deceive others. One way to deceive others is by proposing an offer that seems attractive to them, but in reality is only attractive to oneself. Power was manipulated by giving either the allocator or the recipient the opportunity to destroy the outcomes of their counterpart. Furthermore, both allocator and recipient were given the opportunity to lie about the actual value of the payoffs. Contradicting the idea that it is mainly the powerful who engage in dishonesty, the results revealed that recipients who lacked power were the most likely to use deception. The authors explained this by noting that participants mainly deceive the other party if this is their only option. Powerful negotiators simply use their power, but powerless parties need to be cunning. This observation, of course, runs against the idea that corruption is limited to those who have power. The powerless may also show dishonest, selfish behavior, if this is their only way to defend their interests.

In summary, people who hold a more powerful position are more likely to use this power and take a larger piece of the pie. Power allows people to force the other party to accept a less attractive option. They may be less likely to share or try to reach a compromise but rather rely on their ability to force their negotiating partner to accept a worse deal. Of course, this is not always the case. In negotiations, other considerations, such as honesty and fairness, can also affect outcomes (e.g., van Beest, Steinel, and Murnighan, 2011; van Beest and van Dijk, 2007). Such considerations of honesty and fairness are likely to emerge if the powerful become all-powerful. In such a situation of omnipotence, the powerful may be less motivated to get the most out of it, but instead care for the less powerful. Furthermore, although lacking power generally reduces people's tendency to try to openly force the other party to accept a less attractive option, this does not mean that the powerless let themselves be passively forced into a rotten deal. For example, they may be more likely to use deception, if this is possible. Conversely, those who are in a powerful position are less likely to degrade themselves by trying to trick or swindle their opponent. Who needs deception if one can freely take?

Feelings of power

Positions of power can also bring feelings of power. Usually, the two go hand in hand. If one has a powerful position, one may start to feel

powerful. But feelings of power can also have an effect outside the power relationship. Managers may, for example, have power over their employees and therefore feel powerful. These feelings of power may become chronic, in the sense that managers even feel that sense of power if they are in a different context. These feelings may even change the personality of those managers. As such, these feelings of power have also been studied. A simple way to study power is to *prime* feelings of power. This can be done in a variety of ways, but an often-used technique is simply to ask respondents to briefly recall a personal experience in which they had power (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, and Magee, 2003). Participants are asked to provide a short diary entry about that experience and describe what happened and how it made them feel. The trick about this is that if people recall such experiences in which they had power, then the feelings associated with that experience return and affect subsequent decisions. It is easy to imagine that if you think back about your wedding or another happy day, you will re-experience the feelings associated with that day and that this will lead to a happy mood. This happy mood will linger and may affect decisions that you afterwards make – even if the thoughts of your wedding have already left your conscious mind. The same can be done with feelings of power.

Other techniques involve having participants adopt either a high-power or low-power pose, by asking them either to expand or contract the body (Carney, Cuddy, and Yap, 2010), or having participants sit in either large, comfortable chairs that we associate with positions of power or in uncomfortable, plastic, collapsible chairs that we associate with powerlessness (Berdahl and Martorana, 2006). Even more minimally, participants can also be merely exposed to words associated with power, such as “dominance” or “control” (e.g., Chen, Lee-Chai, and Bargh, 2001). Such words can, for example, be included in a word-search puzzle that the respondent is asked to solve, or they may be briefly flashed on a computer screen (so fast that the respondent cannot consciously read them).

Typically, participants behave differently after such a power-priming task than after a control condition, in which participants are not exposed to the concept of power. Interestingly, these effects occur independently of any awareness of them by the participant. That is, participants are often unaware of why researchers use these manipulations and that they are used to induce feelings of power. This suggests that power can change people without their awareness that such a change occurs.

Moreover, despite the minimal nature of such power primes, the artificially induced feelings of power that result from them have a wide variety of perceptual, motivational, and behavioral effects. The present chapter does not have space for a complete overview, but a common analogy to

summarize at least some of the effects of such manipulated feelings of power is that they resemble those of alcohol (Hirsh, Galinsky, and Zhong, 2011). One reason why people drink alcohol in social situations such as parties is that it has a disinhibiting effect. It loosens up, adds fuel to the impulses, and helps overcome natural inhibitions. Everything that people do at parties – talking, dancing, flirting – they do with more intensity after drinking some alcohol. Power has similar effects. It leads to a more disinhibited mind-set, whereby the powerful trust their feelings more and follow their impulses (Anderson and Berdahl, 2002; Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson, 2003). People who do not experience strong feelings of power hold themselves back, carefully think twice before acting, and consider first what others might think of their actions. But powerful people do not. If they have their eyes fixed on something, they are more likely to plunge themselves into action and follow their impulses (Galinsky *et al.*, 2003).

Although some impulses may be good, many of our impulses can lead to selfishness, materialism, and greed. Our desires for money, status, luxury, and sex form just some of the temptations and attractions that we face on a daily basis. Because powerful people are more disinhibited and likely to follow their impulses, they are less likely to resist such temptations (Galinsky *et al.*, 2003; Hirsh *et al.*, 2011). This makes them more likely to break moral rules. In a study by Lammers, Stapel, and Galinsky (2010a), for example, Dutch university students were presented with a dilemma about a stolen bike. In The Netherlands, bike theft is quite endemic, and it is not uncommon to find stolen bikes abandoned along the road. Technically, these should be reported to the police, but it is generally known that – unless it is a fancy, new bike – the previous owner is not likely to check at the police station in the hope of reclaiming the bike. The price of a new lock is often higher than that of the bike. Lammers and colleagues asked students whether they thought it permissible to appropriate such a stolen bike, and found that feelings of power made participants more likely to defend such behavior.

An interesting twist occurred, however, if participants were asked instead whether it would be acceptable if Mark – an anonymous, fictional protagonist – behaved in this way. Lammers and colleagues reasoned that, although people are tempted to take an old bike, they at the same time also feel an impulse to judge others for doing the same. After all, if someone else takes a stolen bike, it may be mine! They indeed found that feelings of power made participants stricter in judging Mark. Now the powerful suddenly found it quite unacceptable! Thus, feelings of power can increase hypocrisy; that is, the tendency to condemn others for violating the same rules as oneself. Power serves as a reminder to be

stricter on others, but it also serves as a cue that leads people to pursue their own interests more.

Again it should be stressed that the disinhibiting effect of power that drives this is by itself neither corruptive nor commendable. After all, it only amplifies existing impulses. If those impulses are good, then power leads to benevolence (Chen *et al.*, 2001; Galinsky *et al.*, 2003; Hirsh *et al.*, 2011). A further reason why power is not necessarily corruptive lies in the experience of power itself. When studying the link between power and hypocrisy, Lammers and colleagues also found that this power → hypocrisy effect disappeared if people were not asked to recall a common, standard feeling of power, but instead were asked to recall a feeling of power that was undeserved or illegitimate. Participants were instructed to recall situations where they experienced a position of power that they felt they were not entitled to. When presented with the bike dilemma, these people did not show hypocrisy at all. In fact, they were even harsher on themselves than on others – a reversal that Lammers and colleagues termed “hypercrisy.” This finding fits in a wider literature showing that many effects of power reverse if the powerful feel that their position is unfair (e.g., Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn *et al.*, 2008; Rodríguez-Bailón, Moya, and Yzerbyt, 2000; Sligte, De Dreu, and Nijstad, 2011; Willis, Guinote, and Rodríguez-Bailón, 2010).

These results suggest that people with power take more not only because they can get away with it – a function of the position of power, as discussed in the previous section of this chapter – but also because their mere feelings of power make them feel in some way entitled or privileged. After all, if this sense of entitlement is removed, by having the powerful think of an experience of undeserved power, the effect disappears. In fact, the word “privilege,” which is derived from the Latin *privus* (“private”) and *lex* (“law”), literally means a private law or individual right to act differently from the rest, exactly describing how the powerful seem to take their position for granted. This therefore suggests that power is particularly corruptive if it is not questioned. Unquestioned power leads to hypocrisy. To avoid moral corruption, power should be questioned.

Nonetheless, there is also research that warns against that same conclusion. In fact, this research shows that questioning power can even exacerbate power’s corruptive tendencies. More specifically, this research focuses on the dangers of power without status. This is a classic idea that dates back to Max Weber’s (1991/1946) thoughts about the importance of status. Weber noted that judges have significant power in our society. They may sentence people to large fines and years of imprisonment. To accompany this great power, judges are also required to dress in a particular manner. They wear clothes that no other person would wear, to

symbolize that their power is not their own but that of the state. This *status symbol* not only restricts their power (they cannot sentence people outside their role) but also supports the exercise of power within that role. It adds status to their power. Research by Fast and colleagues (Fast and Chen, 2009; Fast, Halevy, and Galinsky, 2012) shows that if power is not accompanied by status, it can lead to undesired side effects. For example, in one study, participants who were given power but also a low-status role were more likely to abuse that power and order subordinates to engage in demeaning activities, such as barking like a dog or telling themselves that they are unworthy (Fast *et al.*, 2012). Another line of research shows that if participants are given a high-power position, but actually feel inadequate, they are more likely to be aggressive towards subordinates, in order to boost and restore their threatened egos (Fast and Chen, 2009).

These findings – that those who feel powerful but also believe that they lack status or competence are more aggressive towards others – seem inconsistent with the earlier finding on the moderating role of illegitimacy. After all, power that lacks status or is not based on competence may be seen as less legitimate and therefore should be associated with inhibition (and therefore reduced aggression). The solution to this inconsistency seems to be that it may crucially depend on whether the powerful internalize feelings of illegitimacy. In the priming instructions used in the research by Lammers and colleagues, respondents are asked to recall an experience of power that they feel to have been undeserved. They therefore themselves question the legitimacy of their power. But in the research by Fast and Chen (2009), for example, the powerful who lack status and competency are likely to be more focused on whether others see their position as illegitimate. Aggression is then a functional response, as it may help to defend one's position.

In summary, much like the research discussed in the first section, on positions of power, this second body of research, on feelings of power, also in part supports Lord Acton's adage and in part qualifies it. Like the research mentioned in the first section, it also supports the idea that power can be corruptive. Yet it shows that this is mainly the case because power disinhibits and therefore adds fuel to the pursuit of impulses. If those impulses are bad, then power leads to immoral behavior. But if those impulses are good, then power amplifies these positive tendencies. In that case, power elevates.

The support for the second part of Lord Acton's idea, that absolute power corrupts absolutely, is also mixed. Some research shows that the disinhibiting effects of power are strong if power is seen as legitimate, but are weak or even reversed if power is seen as illegitimate. This suggests

that if power is questioned (if it is portrayed as illegitimate), its possibly corruptive effects decrease. On the other hand, questioning power can also have negative effects. If the powerful feel that others see them as incompetent or do not give them the status that they feel entitled to, then this may lead to even more corrupted behaviors.

Actual differences in power

A third and final line of research that we discuss here is one where power is measured by comparing a great number of less and more powerful people and determining whether their degree of power correlates with certain behaviors. This is perhaps, at least in the eyes of the layperson, the most straightforward approach. If one wants to know about the behavior of the powerful, then why not simply observe a lot of powerful people and consider how they are different from less powerful people. Yet, a problem with this approach is that it can only show correlation. Powerful people may differ in many respects from less powerful people. They are older, richer, and better educated, for example. However, that does not mean that these differences are caused by power. Perhaps wealth causes power. Or education increases both wealth and power. Nonetheless, this third approach is useful because it can serve as a confirmation of findings of the previous experimental approach to the effects of feelings of power. If feelings of power really affect the power holder, then we should find that if we compare a large number of powerful with a large number of less powerful people, the two groups will differ.

Using this idea, Lammers *et al.* (2010b, 2011) have conducted a number of large-scale surveys among readers of *Intermediair Magazine*, a journal aimed at professionals working in business and nonprofit companies in The Netherlands. This offers a particularly good sample, because in this sample power can be measured relatively easily and without many assumptions. In other power hierarchies, this is less easy. Take, for example, politics. It is unclear whether the prime minister, the president, the leader of the ruling party, or its chairman has the most power. If we ask them, they will probably point to each other. Moreover, they might add that the real power lies with the opposition, the bureaucracy, the media, or even the people. This is not mere modesty. It is just very hard to quantify power. Look at *Forbes'* annual list of powerful people. Who is more powerful, Mark Zuckerberg or the Pope? Obama or Bill Gates? Michael Bloomberg or Kim Jong-un?

But these problems are smaller in business. Most people would agree with the assumption that top management has more power than middle management, which has more power than lower management, which has

more power than nonmanagement. Using a large sample of managers, Lammers and Stoker (2013) have found some interesting correlations between power and other variables. Most fundamentally, the study has confirmed a medium-sized relationship between power and behavioral disinhibition. In a sample of over 3,000 Dutch managers, hierarchical position explained 6% of the variance of an established measure of disinhibition, while a scale that also included a variety of more subjective measures of power explained about 12% of the variance. Interestingly, these data also showed a significant quadratic component, meaning that the relationship between power and disinhibition is weak at the lower-power strata, but much stronger at the higher-power strata. In other words, people with some power are somewhat disinhibited, but people with a lot of power are very, very disinhibited. In laypeople's terms, they are not just a little intoxicated by their power but seem to be blind drunk.

The correlational measure has also been used to study corruptive effects more directly. For example, using the same population, Lammers and Stoker (2013) presented a large number of respondents with a scenario involving corporate selfishness: Would it be acceptable for a CEO to award top management a 40% wage increase, in order to keep salaries competitive with the market, while at the same time freezing the wages of his other employees? The results of the study showed that the power position of the respondents correlated positively with the degree to which they thought this behavior to be morally acceptable. Respondents in nonmanagement and lower management found this behavior less acceptable than did respondents in middle and top management. This matches the earlier described effect of power on hypocrisy, in the sense that the little people pay (salaries at the bottom are frozen) so that the powerful can enjoy the spoils (the 40% wage increase).

Of course, this latter effect is only about the endorsement of questionable behaviors – it is not about actual behavior. But another line of research has also focused on the effect of power on whether people engage in questionable behaviors – although of a completely different nature. Specifically, relying on a sample of 1,561 respondents, again taken from the *Intermediair* readership, Lammers *et al.* (2011) asked whether respondents had ever been unfaithful to their partner. The results showed a positive effect of power, meaning that respondents with a high-power position were more likely to have engaged in infidelity, even after controlling for gender, age, and education. Of course, these results may be partially due to the fact that the powerful have greater opportunities for infidelity. For example, men with power may also have more money and a more expensive car, and this may make them more attractive in the eyes of women (Dunn and Searle, 2010). Yet it seems unlikely that

this can explain the finding. First of all, the effect of power on infidelity was as large for women as it was for men. Nonetheless, most men are not very strongly attracted to high-power career women (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick *et al.*, 2002). Rather, it seems that powerful women engage more in infidelity because they follow their impulses more. This explanation is bolstered by the fact that the effect was driven by increased confidence – a behavioral state closely associated with disinhibition. Moreover, powerful men and women indicated a higher likelihood that they would engage in infidelity. This suggests that they are at least partly aware of their difficulty in controlling their impulses. Replicating this finding in a smaller sample of 623 professionals, Lammers and Maner (2012) found that among respondents who were in a nonmanagement position and also had a committed romantic relationship, only 9% admitted that they currently had a lover, while among respondents in top-management positions, this percentage increased to 32% among men and a whopping 40% among women. In other words, compared to respondents in low-power positions, the likelihood of adultery was tripled among high-power men and quadrupled among high-power women!

Discussion: does power corrupt?

Led by Lord Acton's adage that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely, the current chapter reviewed three bodies of research, all of which use a different way to answer that question. Some research focuses on positions of power, while other research focuses on feelings of power. The conclusions that these three branches of research reach on the effects of power are partially overlapping, but also partially different. If people hold a position of power, then they are aware of this and they will adapt their tactics to this. For example, in the study of Handgraaf *et al.* (2008), respondents know how much control they have over their own and their negotiating partner's outcomes. The more power they have, the more they realize that their partner lacks power and that they can therefore use their power and get away with it. Feelings of power seem to have a different effect. Most notably, they lead to behavioral disinhibition. Feelings of power do not lead to disinhibition because of a change in perceived constraints, but because feelings of power automatically induce a disinhibited mind-set.

Returning to Lord Acton's adage, does power corrupt and does absolute power corrupt absolutely? Most of the time, power will have an effect through both the position of power and the associated feelings of power. That is, both mechanisms will work simultaneously. People who have a powerful position will be more likely to use their power (De Dreu, 1995;

Handgraaf *et al.*, 2008). This may lead them to force their favored outcome on powerless parties. This may lead to corruption, in the sense that the powerful will be more likely to use methods – perhaps, any method – that will get them what they want. Feelings of power that accompany such a position will also affect the state of mind of the powerful and lead to more disinhibited behavior (Galinsky *et al.*, 2003; Keltner *et al.*, 2003). Much like alcohol, power can reduce self-control and lead people to cross boundaries (Hirsh *et al.*, 2011). This may have corruptive effects; the powerful may be more likely to use any strategy that they think of to force the powerless party to accept their decision. But it may also have positive effects. If the powerful have more positive intentions, then disinhibition will increase these. Finally, feelings of power can also have corruptive effects outside a direct power relation. For example, they may lead to a more hypocritical view of moral issues (Lammers *et al.*, 2010a) or even increase adultery (Lammers *et al.*, 2011). For these reasons, power can be a corruptive force. But it does not need to be and can also propel the powerful to do more good.

Furthermore, if power indeed can have corruptive effects, then does unrestrained power lead to much more negative effects than restrained power? Does absolute power corrupt absolutely? The findings of Handgraaf *et al.* (2008) suggest that this is not the case for positions of power. If people have complete control over the outcome of a situation, they are disinclined to use that control to its maximum. Omnipotence reduces strategic considerations and the desire to beat the opponent and replaces them by thoughts about care and kindness. Hence, for positions of power it seems that absolute power does not corrupt absolutely.

For feelings of power, however, it does seem that absolute power is more corruptive than moderate power. The findings by Lammers *et al.* (2010b) show that *feelings* of power increase behavioral disinhibition, but this power–disinhibition link grows strongest among the higher-power strata. Now, disinhibition does not necessarily mean corruption. If the powerful have a desire to do good, then those with absolute power will be most inclined to do good. But given that disinhibition is also linked to many negative effects, such as infidelity and hypocrisy, absolute power may indeed be more corruptive than lesser forms of power. This conclusion is further supported by some experimental research. In particular, research shows that this disinhibiting effect of power is there only as long as power is seen as legitimate. If the powerful feel that their power is illegitimate, then that disinhibiting effect is blocked (Lammers *et al.*, 2008). On the other hand, if feelings of power are challenged more openly – for example, by making the powerful feel incompetent or by removing their status – then the powerful may lash out to defend their coveted position,

and this may also lead to immorality (Fast and Chen, 2009; Fast *et al.*, 2012).

Conclusion

In summary, although the relationship is complex, power can – both through the position and through feelings of power – strongly affect people's behavior and have a corruptive effect. Power can amplify unwanted tendencies and impulses. Much like alcohol, power tends to remove constraints and make people give way to their desires, impulses, and whims. If those desires, impulses, and whims are benevolent, then there is no real problem. But if they are of a morally corrupt nature, then power corrupts. This does not mean that all people with power are alike. In fact, because they more easily follow their impulses, people with power are probably less alike than other, less- powerful people. But it does mean that many powerful people are at risk. Many forms of derailment among the most powerful may be directly linked to the disinhibiting effects of power. This means that we may need to help the powerful to deal with their power. After all, it is the people with power who make most of the important decisions in our society – not just politicians and administrators, but also industrialists, bankers, and military leaders. If they, for some reason, are at risk of being corrupted by their power (in combination with unwanted impulses), then we need to help them control their impulses.

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3 Do we give power to the right people? When and how norm violators rise to the top

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A dominant idea in this book is the idea that power leads to corrupted behavior, and this in turn makes people mistrust those who have power. This popular idea has been repeatedly supported by scientific evidence (e.g., Kipnis, 1972). What is unclear, however, is how corruption affects a person's power position. One would hope, perhaps, that power holders who break the rules fall from grace and lose their power. But is this the case? Or might the very act of breaking the rules actually fuel perceptions of power? We develop a theoretical argument for the latter possibility, which is supported by recent empirical findings, and we set forth three propositions to elucidate this seemingly paradoxical finding.

To explore how breaking rules affects a person's power position we focus on the effects of norm violations on perceptions of power and on power affordance. Norms are rules or principles – implicit or explicit – that are understood by members of a group and that guide and constrain behavior without the force of laws to generate proper and acceptable conduct (Cialdini and Trost, 1998). Accordingly, we define norm violation as behavior that infringes one or more principles of proper and acceptable behavior (Van Kleef, Homan, Finkenauer *et al.*, 2011). Norm violations are ubiquitous and they come in many shapes. People put their feet on the opposite seat in the train; the boss enters your office without knocking; friends carry on a loud conversation in the movie theater; colleagues answer their cellphones while in a meeting; visitors drop their cigarette ash on the floor of the cafeteria. How do such behaviors shape observers' perceptions of the actor's power and concomitant power affordance? We propose that individuals who violate norms are seen as more powerful than those who do not violate norms, and that such perceptions may in turn fuel actual power affordance. Part of our argument rests on

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literature regarding the link between power and tendencies towards norm violation, to which we now turn.

From power to norm violation

According to the approach/inhibition theory of power (Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson, 2003), the powerful are relatively free to behave as they wish. High-power individuals encounter fewer social constraints and more resource-rich environments (e.g., money, knowledge, support). This activates their behavioral approach system, which is accompanied by behavioral disinhibition. Low-power individuals, in contrast, experience more social constraints, threats, and punishments. This activates their behavioral inhibition system, which restricts their actions.

Indeed, high-power people appear to act at will without fear of negative consequences. Individuals who feel powerful make more optimistic risk assessments. This optimistic perception renders them more likely to take risks – for instance, to engage in unprotected sex or divulge their interests in a negotiation (Anderson and Galinsky, 2006). This is consistent with research showing that power activates the behavioral approach system (BAS), which is associated with a heightened sensitivity to rewards and opportunities (Smith and Bargh, 2008). Furthermore, power facilitates goal pursuit by increasing the readiness to act in a goal-consistent manner (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, and Magee, 2003), and by increasing persistence, flexibility, and ability to seize good opportunities for goal pursuit (Guinote, 2007). High-power individuals express emotions, such as by smiling, when they feel inclined rather than obligated to do so (Hecht and Lafrance, 1998). They are also more likely to act according to their dispositional inclinations (Chen, Lee-Chai, and Bargh, 2001) and momentary desires (Van Kleef and Côté, 2007), and ignore situational pressures (Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld *et al.*, 2008). When interacting with low-power individuals, for instance, high-power individuals with a communal relationship orientation responded in socially responsible ways and those with an exchange relationship orientation acted more in line with their self-interest (Chen *et al.*, 2001). The experience of elevated power nourishes a strong inclination to disinhibited action that is freed from social conventions. Accordingly, in a social dilemma, high-power individuals were more likely to either give more from a common source acting against the norm of personal restraint or take more than others acting out of self-interest (Galinsky *et al.*, 2008).

The combination of behavioral disinhibition with disregard for social norms makes powerful people more likely to exhibit socially inappropriate behavior. Compared to low-power individuals, high-power individuals

are more likely to take excessive cookies from a common plate, eat with their mouths open, and spread crumbs (Keltner *et al.*, 2003); interrupt conversation partners and invade their personal space (DePaulo and Friedman, 1998); fail to take another person's perspective (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi *et al.*, 2006); ignore other people's suffering (van Kleef, Oveis, van der Löwe *et al.*, 2008); stereotype (Fiske, 1993) and patronize others (Vescio, Gervais, Snyder *et al.*, 2005); practice less strict moral behavior themselves while imposing strict moral standards on others (Lammers, Stapel, and Galinsky, 2010); take credit for the contributions of others (Kipnis, 1972); and treat other people as a means to their own ends (Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee *et al.*, 2008) – while high-power men are more likely to sexualize and harass low-power women (Bargh, Raymond, Pryor *et al.*, 1995).

From norm violation to power

The above-mentioned theorizing and research show that there is a strong association between power and socially inappropriate behavior. We propose that this association is bidirectional. Because certain behaviors are believed to be associated with power (Hall, Coats, and LeBeau, 2005), the cues themselves may signal power (Ridgeway, Berger, and Smith, 1985). Past research has shown that, when people perceive others around them, they may use such cues to infer their level of power (cf. Tiedens, 2001). For instance, individuals who display greater action orientation are perceived as more powerful because they signal that they have the capacity to act according to their own volition (Magee, 2009) – a freedom that comes with greater power (Galinsky *et al.*, 2003; Keltner *et al.*, 2003). Extending this logic, we hypothesized that norm violators are perceived as more powerful than norm abiders (Van Kleef *et al.*, 2011).

In the first study by Van Kleef *et al.* (2011), participants read a story about a target person (termed “actor”) who exhibits norm-violating versus neutral behavior. They imagined having to wait in a room in the city hall. In the norm-violation condition, the actor helps himself to the staff coffee when the service desk is empty. In the neutral condition, the actor merely goes to the bathroom, and returns shortly thereafter. Participants in the norm-violation condition rated the actor as more powerful than in the control condition (e.g., “I think this person . . . is influential”; “enjoys considerable authority”).

In another scenario study, we replicated this effect in an organizational context and investigated a potential explanatory mechanism behind it. Participants read about a bookkeeper who either sticks to the rules or violates the rules of bookkeeping. In line with our predictions, participants

perceived the bookkeeper who bent the rules as having more power – e.g., “This person can influence other people’s pay level” (Hinkin and Schriesheim, 1989) – and higher volitional capacity – e.g., “This person feels free to do what he wants” (Magee, 2009) – than the bookkeeper who followed the rules. Moreover, the effect of norm violation on power perception was fully mediated by volition inferences.

In the next study, participants watched a short video clip featuring a male actor in a cafeteria. In the norm-violation video, the actor puts his feet on a chair, repeatedly drops his cigarette ash on the floor, and gives an order to the waiter in an abrupt and rude manner. In the control video, the actor crosses his legs, drops the ash in the ashtray, and orders politely. Next, participants learned that the actor eventually received a wrong order. We then measured power perception with the Generalized Sense of Power Scale – e.g., “I think this person has a great deal of power” (Anderson and Galinsky, 2006). We further included an indirect measure of power by assessing participants’ expectations of the actor’s emotional reaction and behavioral tendencies with regard to the wrong order. Research on emotion stereotypes has found that high-power individuals are expected to react with more anger and less sadness to negative events (Tiedens, Ellsworth, and Mesquita, 2000) and, accordingly, to exhibit more active (e.g., approach, confrontation) and less passive (e.g., inhibition, helplessness) action tendencies (Keltner *et al.*, 2003) than low-power individuals. As anticipated, participants in the norm-violation condition perceived the actor as more powerful and they expected him to feel more anger and less sadness, and to react with more approach tendencies to the wrong order (e.g., “He will express his opposition” and “He will ask the waiter to change his order”) and less inhibition tendency (e.g., “He will try to stop thinking about the situation” and “He will content himself with the current order”). These findings are depicted in [Figure 3.1](#).

Finally, we replicated the norm-violation-to-power effect in a face-to-face interaction study. When the participants arrived, one confederate was already waiting outside the lab (the “control” confederate, who behaved appropriately throughout the session). The experimenter led both inside the lab and told them that the experiment would start as soon as the third participant (the “norm violator” confederate) had arrived. The norm-violator confederate arrived 1.5 minutes late. He threw his bag on the table in front of the couches where the participant and the other confederate were sitting, and he put his feet on the table. Supposedly in preparation for a joint task, the participants then rated the two confederates on a number of dimensions. Consistent with the other studies, participants rated the norm violator higher on volitional capacity and they perceived him as more powerful than the control confederate.

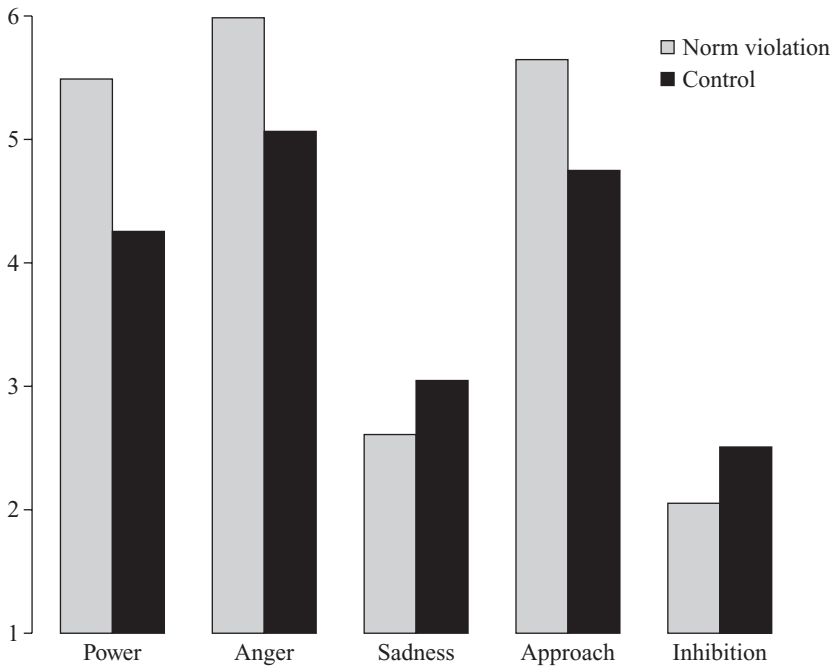


Figure 3.1 Effects of norm violation on perceptions of power, expected emotional reactions, and approach/inhibition tendencies. This figure is based on findings reported in Van Kleef *et al.*, 2011, Study 3.

Mediation analyses showed that the norm-violation effect could be explained in terms of volition inferences: norm violators were perceived as having the freedom to act at will, fueling perceptions of power.

In short, four studies using different research paradigms and different norm violations indicate that norm violations can indeed produce perceptions of power. This effect emerged on various explicit measures of power as well as on indirect, unobtrusive measures, and it appears to hold both when participants report on someone they have never seen (based on descriptions or video clips depicting the person's behavior) and when they form impressions of someone with whom they have recently interacted.

When do norm violators rise to power? Making sense of a paradox

The idea that power corrupts and propels individuals to violate norms is well documented and explains why laypeople are mistrustful and

suspicious of the powerful. Yet, the reverse possibility, that norm violations fuel perceptions of power, seems paradoxical and also incompatible with people's frequently expressed wariness of the powerful. Our investigation (Van Kleef *et al.*, 2011) summarized above showed that norm violations may trigger perceptions of power. Nevertheless, people may not necessarily perceive norm violators as worthy of power and grant them power. In some cases, power perceptions and power affordance go hand in hand. For instance, a person who defends her fellow group members against an outside threat is likely to be perceived as powerful (because she shows leadership) and to be afforded power (because she takes care of the group's interests). However, in many cases, power perceptions and power affordance are disconnected. It is possible to perceive a person as powerful (e.g., because one knows that the person holds power or because he shows stereotypically powerful behavior) while not being willing to afford (more) power to this person. In a totalitarian regime, people realize that their dictator has power, but not everyone may be happy with this situation. Thus, if they were given the chance, these people would probably not vote for the dictator. Conversely, it is conceivable that power is afforded to someone who does not appear powerful. For instance, people may reward a person for behaving modestly by giving her power (Keltner, Van Kleef, Chen, and Kraus, 2008), even though she did not show stereotypically powerful behavior (in fact, the opposite). Thus, perceiving a person as powerful and being willing to afford them power can be two independent processes (Van Kleef, Homan, Finkenauer *et al.*, 2012).

Furthermore, it seems unlikely (and perhaps disturbing) that norm violators would always rise to power. The question arises, then, of when norm violations result in the acquisition of power and when they do not. In the remainder of this chapter, we advance three propositions that aim to illuminate this issue and explain the paradoxical effect of norm violation on power perceptions.

Proposition 1: prosocial norm violations fuel power affordance, but selfish norm violations do not

The reciprocal-influence model of power (Keltner *et al.*, 2008) posits that subordinates' capacity to form alliances forces powerful individuals to engage socially and advance the interests of the group, because if they fail to do so their position may be undermined (for related arguments, see Boehm, 1999; van Vugt, 2006). Accordingly, the model's social-engagement hypothesis holds that power is afforded preferentially to those who advance the interests of the group.

Until recently, support for the social-engagement hypothesis was provided exclusively by studies of socially accepted traits and behaviors such as extroversion, playfulness, and generosity (see Keltner *et al.*, 2008, for a review). Thus, the question arose of whether socially unacceptable behaviors such as norm violations would also lead to power affordance as long as they benefit one's social environment. Some norm violations are inherently disruptive, such as carrying on a loud conversation in the movie theater. Other norm violations may actually benefit one's social group. A famous example is Robin Hood, the legendary archer who stole from the rich to help the poor.

A recent series of studies indicates that norm violations can indeed fuel power affordance, provided that the norm violation is prosocial rather than selfish (Van Kleef *et al.*, 2012). In the first of these studies, participants read a short scenario about a company outing with a tour bus. The seat of one passenger (the focal actor) is already slightly tilted back. This passenger decides to adjust his seat to either an upright position, resulting in more legroom for the person sitting behind him (prosocial behavior), or one further back, thus restricting the legroom of the person behind him (selfish behavior). In light of the bus driver's instructions, either the passenger's behavior constitutes a norm violation (i.e., when the bus driver said, "Please leave the seats in their current positions, because if they are adjusted further up or down they may become stuck"), or it does not (i.e., when the driver said "Please do not eat or drink on board the bus"). This study focused on perceptions of legitimate power (e.g., "This passenger . . . has a legitimate right to influence others; . . . can make others feel that they have commitments to meet"), which form an important precursor to power affordance (French and Raven, 1959). The results showed that when the passenger behaved selfishly, participants rated him lower in legitimate power in the norm-violation than in the control condition. In contrast, when the passenger behaved prosocially, power ratings were higher in the norm-violation than in the control condition. These results demonstrate that prosocial norm violations fuel perceptions of legitimate power, whereas selfish norm violations do not.

The second study employed a different experimental methodology, investigated a potential mechanism underlying the aforementioned effect, and used a more direct measure of power affordance. Participants watched a 20-second film clip that showed a waiting room with three actors. The main (male) actor would stand up after a few seconds to close the window. His action had either prosocial implications (i.e., when the two other actors, who were visibly cold, stopped shivering), or selfish implications (i.e., when the two other actors, who were visibly warm, continued fanning themselves). Additionally, closing the window was either

a norm violation, because there was a sign on the window saying "Do not touch," or not a violation (when there was no sign). Participants then reported on their tendency to afford power to the main actor (e.g., "I would like this person as my boss" and "I would like this person as my political leader") and rated the actor's social engagement (e.g., "I think he is . . . helpful . . . sympathetic").

When the actor's behavior was selfish, power affordance was somewhat lower in the norm-violation than in the control condition, and there was no significant difference in perceived social engagement. When the actor's behavior was prosocial, however, participants perceived the actor as more socially engaged and were more willing to afford him power in the norm-violation than in the control condition. Further analyses showed that perceived social engagement fully mediated the effect of prosocial norm violations on power affordance. Yet, a question that was not addressed by these two studies was whether selfish norm violations reduced power affordance because they did not benefit other people or because they harmed other people. If the negative effect of selfish norm violations in the two studies described above was driven by their harmfulness, there should be no difference between a norm-violation condition and a condition where the actor's norm violation neither harms nor benefits others; that is, when it is inconsequential for the perceiver.

To investigate this, a third study compared prosocial to inconsequential norm violations in a face-to-face experimental setting. Upon arrival in the lab, participants received instructions that they would play a computerized board game with another participant, who was in fact a confederate. Participants learned that before playing the game they would complete a number of questionnaires. There was a desk in the room that clearly belonged to the experimenter, with a computer, piles of questionnaires, pencils, administrative paperwork, and a coffee pot with some plastic cups. At a certain point, the experimenter left the room. Shortly thereafter, the confederate stood up, walked to the experimenter's desk, and either got coffee for himself without offering coffee to the participant (inconsequential behavior) or asked if the participant cared for a cup of coffee, and if so, poured both of them a cup (prosocial behavior). Of note, before the experimenter left the room, he said that the participants could take coffee if they wanted (control condition), or he did not invite them to take coffee (norm violation condition). When the experimenter returned, participants completed questionnaires in separate rooms, including a power affordance scale (e.g., "I would let the other person . . . influence the game"; ". . . control my outcomes"; ". . . have power over me").

The results showed that participants conferred more power upon the confederate when he got coffee without invitation than when he did

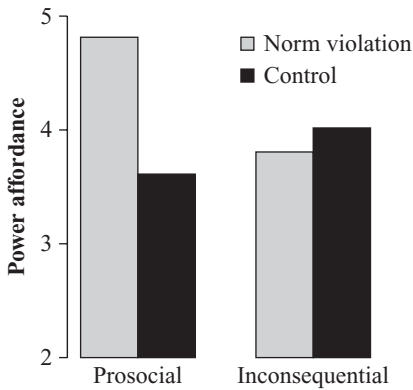


Figure 3.2 Power affordance as a function of norm violation (stealing coffee vs. taking coffee upon invitation) and prosociality (offering coffee to another person vs. keeping coffee for self). This figure is based on findings reported in Van Kleef *et al.*, 2012, Study 3.

so upon invitation (norm violation main effect). Furthermore, when the confederate's behavior had prosocial consequences, norm violation inspired more power affordance than no violation. When the confederate's behavior had no consequences for the participant, there was no significant difference (see Figure 3.2). These results indicate that the effects of prosocial norm violations on power affordance generalize to face-to-face interaction. Moreover, they suggest that selfish norm violations do not undermine power as long as they do not harm other individuals. Finally, this study indicates that acting prosocially does not necessarily result in power affordance. The confederate who fetched coffee for the participants was not afforded power when taking coffee was allowed, but only when taking coffee was not allowed. Thus, intriguingly, prosocial behaviors may fuel power affordance when they go against the rules.

These findings indicate that power is afforded only to those individuals who violate norms in a way that benefits others. Individuals who broke the rules at the expense of others were afforded less power than those who obeyed the rules. Norm violations may lead to perceptions of power (Van Kleef *et al.*, 2011), but they only inspire power affordance when they benefit rather than harm other people (Van Kleef *et al.*, 2012). Norm violators who act in favor of the group by breaking the rules may repair or improve the group's state of affairs. In this light, people's choice to confer power to norm violators may be functional for the viability of the community and the advancement of its interests.

Proposition 2: cultural tightness and collectivism alter people's attitude towards norm violations

Norms cannot exist in isolation from the social world – they are defined by and embedded in a social context involving the shared expectations of others. Therefore, what constitutes a norm violation may shift according to a society's norms and the way those norms translate into behavior (Goode, 2002). This element of subjectivity in norm violations opens them up to different interpretations. We propose that the interpretation and evaluation of the same norm-violating behavior may vary across cultures as a function of the severity of punishment for norm violations meted out in a given society (tightness vs. looseness) and the salience of the group in individuals' self-concept (collectivism vs. individualism).

Although norm violations can indeed signal power, it remains to be seen whether this association holds in cultures that impose severe sanctions for norm violations. The way cultures differ regarding external societal constraints is captured by the tightness–looseness dimension (Bolddt, 1978; Peltó, 1968; Triandis, 1989). South Asian and Confucian nations (e.g., Pakistan and Japan) are among the tightest whereas Latin American and Eastern European nations (e.g., Brazil and Ukraine) are the least tight. Tightness is associated with strong norms and low tolerance of deviant behavior, which restricts the range of behavior deemed appropriate across everyday situations and settings (e.g., cafeterias, libraries, public parks, etc.). By contrast, looseness is associated with weak norms and high tolerance of deviant behavior, affording a wider range of permissible behavior across everyday situations (Gelfand *et al.*, 2011). The strength (or weakness) of everyday recurring situations within nations simultaneously reflects and supports the degree of order and coordination in the larger cultural context. Compared to individuals in loose cultures, individuals in tight cultures are more concerned with conforming to normative rules and have psychological qualities that promote social order. As a case in point, individuals in tight nations were found to be less involved in actions that challenge societal institutions (e.g., demonstrations, strikes, and petitions) and to have a higher need for structure (Gelfand *et al.*, 2011).

Given the greater preference for structure, norm violations may be considered a threat to the social order in tight nations, since norm violations by definition break with tradition. As a consequence, people in tight nations may afford less power to individuals who violate the norms than to individuals who abide by the norms, even if the former are still perceived as more powerful. In loose nations, in contrast, deviations from the norm may be seen as a way to produce social change, innovation, and

creativity, and therefore norm violators may be embraced and afforded more power than norm abiders.

Societies impose sanctions on norm violators because norms play a pivotal role in the functioning of any group, regardless of how tight or loose the society is. Norms ensure group survival, increase the predictability of group members' behavior, save group members from embarrassing interpersonal situations, and give expression to the group's central values (Kiesler and Kiesler, 1970). Thus, violating a norm could endanger the group (Feldman, 1984). This entails that the centrality of the group in individuals' self-concept, which is the core distinction between collectivism and individualism, may alter the meaning of norm violations across cultures.¹

In collectivist groups, there is considerable emphasis on relationships, the maintenance of harmony, and "sticking with" the group. Members of collectivist groups are socialized to avoid conflict, to empathize with others, and to avoid drawing attention to themselves (Goncalo and Staw, 2006; Kim and Markus, 1999). In contrast, members of individualist cultures tend to define themselves in terms of their independence from groups and autonomy and are socialized to value individual freedoms and individual expressions. In individualist cultures, standing out and being different is often seen as a sign of character and courage (for a review, see Triandis, 1995; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal *et al.*, 1988). Implicit in the characterization of collectivist and individualist groups is the assumption that deviance will be downgraded more in groups that prescribe collectivism than in groups that prescribe individualism. Indeed, empirical research shows that individualist group norms broaden the latitude of acceptable group member behavior (Hornsey, Jetten, McAuliffe, and Hogg, 2006) and non-normative characteristics (e.g., left-handedness; Kinias, Kim, Hafenbrack *et al.*, unpublished).

If individualist cultures encourage distinctiveness (Kim and Markus, 1999; Kim and Sherman, 2008; but see also Becker, Vignoles, Owe *et al.*, 2012) and thus tolerate deviance, then norm-violating behavior might be interpreted as a sign of uniqueness and autonomy. We would therefore expect that these societies would afford more power to norm violators than to norm abiders. In collectivist cultures, however, norm-violating behavior may be seen as a disruption of group harmony. We would therefore expect that, even if norm violators are seen as more

¹ Individualism–collectivism is distinct from tightness–looseness (Gelfand *et al.*, 2011; Triandis, 1989) even though they may be moderately correlated (Carpenter, 2000). There are societies or groups that are relatively collectivistic and loose (e.g., Brazil, Hong Kong), collectivistic and tight (e.g., Japan, Singapore), individualist and loose (e.g., the USA, The Netherlands), and individualist and tight (e.g., Germany).

powerful, they would be afforded less power than norm abiders in collectivist cultures.

Based on the foregoing considerations, cross-cultural differences in tolerance for deviant behavior (i.e., tightness) and individual differentiation (i.e., collectivism) may independently or jointly influence how the members of a society evaluate and deal with norm violators. From a social-evolutionary point of view, we would expect that the way societies deal with norm violators may be functional within their own historical and ecological context. For instance, tight nations may reinforce social order and stability by excluding norm violators from positions of power, whereas loose nations may pave the way for social change and innovation by conferring power on norm violators.

Preliminary findings based on a Dutch sample show that within the same culture individuals who show less conformity-oriented behavior are more likely to perceive a norm violator as more powerful (relative to a norm abider) than individuals who exhibit more conformity-oriented behavior. These results demonstrate that individuals vary in the extent to which they internalize or endorse a cultural ideal (Leung and Cohen, 2011). In The Netherlands, for instance, individuals who endorse the cultural ideal of looseness by being less conformist themselves are more likely to perceive a norm violator as powerful; for those who reject looseness, however, as they are more conformist, the effect of norm violation on power substantially diminishes. This may imply that within-culture variability of responses to norm violators may reflect between-culture differences, and this implication led the way to a large-scale research project that examines additional cultures across the full range of tightness versus looseness, which is currently underway.

The foregoing theorizing and research warrant the tentative conclusion that the polysemy of norm violations may render them susceptible to different interpretations across cultures. Our approach aspires to jointly consider both culture and individual differences in an integrated account that can capture most of the within- and between-culture variation in people's perception of norm violators.

Proposition 3: norm violations are an insidious means of hierarchy reinforcement

Social hierarchies seem to be a universal default for human social organization (Fiske, 2010). Hierarchies form rapidly in human groups, because they require only minimal social interaction to emerge (Anderson and Kilduff, 2009; van Vugt, 2006). Once formed, they tend to be self-reinforcing and long-lasting (Magee and Galinsky, 2008). Theoretical

and empirical accounts suggest that the persistence of hierarchies may be justified by their utilitarian value and processing ease (Keltner *et al.*, 2008). First, hierarchies are an effective relational form for coordinating activity, allocating resources, increasing accountability, acknowledging expertise, and efficiently executing a plan (Greer and Van Kleef, 2010; Halevy, Chou, and Galinsky, 2011; Leavitt, 2005; Ronay, Greenway, Anicich *et al.*, 2012; Weber, 1946). Second, hierarchies seem to be fluent social stimuli – that is, they are processed more easily and therefore liked better than less hierarchical stimuli (Zitek and Tiedens, 2012). If hierarchies feature such qualities, people might seek them out, even without necessarily intending to or realizing they have done so.

Indeed, although people usually endorse explicit statements about the value of equality and reject explicit statements about the value of hierarchy (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan *et al.*, 1996; Fiske, 1991), there is evidence that they unconsciously enjoy dominance complementarity – that is, an unequal distribution of power (Tiedens, Unzueta, and Young, 2007). People's desire for hierarchy could thus be an unconsciously held goal rather than an explicitly stated goal. Even though it can be difficult to establish the existence of unconscious goals, there is ample evidence that unconsciously held desires affect people's behavior and cognition through mechanisms that are completely outside conscious awareness (Chartrand and Bargh, 1996; Chartrand and Jefferis, 2003).

In fact, advocates of system justification theory argue that there is a general ideological motive to justify the existing social order, which is observed most readily at an implicit level of awareness and, paradoxically, is sometimes strongest among those who are most harmed by the status quo (Jost, Banaji, and Nosek, 2004). Research reveals that individuals at the bottom of the social ladder work to support hierarchies by making decisions that benefit those at the top of the hierarchy, even at their own expense, and by showing favoritism towards those above them (Umpress, Smith-Crowe, Brief *et al.*, 2007).

Building on these notions, we propose that people's tendency to see power in norm violation and even afford power to norm violators may be an implicit mechanism of hierarchy reinforcement. Because power leads to behavioral disinhibition (Galinsky *et al.*, 2003; Keltner *et al.*, 2003), the powerful are more likely to violate norms (Kipnis, 1972; Lammers *et al.*, 2010). Doing so in turn leads other people to perceive them as powerful (Van Kleef *et al.*, 2011) or even confer power on them (van Kleef *et al.*, 2012). As individuals thus gain power, their behavior becomes even more liberated, possibly leading to more norm violations, and thus evoking a self-reinforcing process. This circuit from power to norm violations to power affordance may play a role in the perpetuation and reinforcement

of social hierarchies, and it may also explain the congregation of norm violators at the highest rank (Piff, Stancato, Côté *et al.*, 2012).

If the norm-violation-to-power effect is part of a mechanism that bolsters the status quo, it would be interesting to investigate whether people are aware that their readiness to confer power on norm violators may eventually support the social hierarchy. In other words, does this mechanism operate on a conscious rather than nonconscious level? If it works on a conscious level, we would expect that, because lower-status individuals are harmed the most by the status quo, they would be more motivated to resist the status quo (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999) and thus be less likely than higher-status individuals to give power to norm violators. If, however, this mechanism evolves on a nonconscious level, we would expect that lower-status individuals, who have a greater need to justify the system in order to reduce ideological dissonance (Jost *et al.*, 2004), would be more likely to confer power on norm violators.

By contrast, those in the upper echelons of society should be less likely to give power to individuals who break the rules, because rules maintain and strengthen the social order, which in turn guards the status quo and protects their interests (Cialdini and Trost, 1998). Furthermore, high-status individuals have a stronger motivation to achieve and maintain their social standing (Frank, 1985; Maner, Gailliot, Butz *et al.*, 2007). This renders them more competitive and reluctant to share their resources (Piff, Kraus, Côté *et al.*, 2010) and privileged position with anyone who strives for power by showing stereotypically dominant behavior, such as norm violators. By blocking norm violators' way to the top, high-status individuals may achieve a short-lived goal of preserving their own little niche in the hierarchy – a strategy that eventually reinforces and perpetuates the social hierarchy in the long run.

Preliminary findings from investigations in our lab indicate that individuals may not be aware that their choices work to support the status quo. In a scenario study, participants rated their self-perceived socioeconomic status (SES) (e.g., “My family usually had enough money for things when I was growing up”; Griskevicius, Tybur, Delton *et al.*, 2011), and then read a political candidate's speech. The candidate was in favor of either normative (e.g., “Rules are there for a reason”) or counter-normative behavior (e.g., “Rules are there to be broken”). Furthermore, the candidate declared his willingness either to follow or break the rules in order to benefit his country. We added this information to control for the effect of prosocial behavior by making all conditions prosocial. Then participants answered a few statements measuring power affordance in that particular context (e.g., “I would like this person to make decisions on important political issues”). The results showed that lower-SES

participants were more likely than higher-SES participants to confer power on a political candidate who was in favor of rule-breaking behavior. By contrast, the political candidate who was in favor of rule-abiding behavior was afforded more power by higher-SES participants than lower-SES participants.

Even though this evidence is only suggestive, it indicates that individuals who have a disadvantaged position are more likely to afford power to norm violators, thereby providing a particularly insidious means by which the social hierarchy is being reinforced and perpetuated. Those who hold a privileged position, on the other hand, are more likely to confer power on compliant individuals.

Epilogue

Scientific research has repeatedly confirmed lay beliefs about the power holder's tendency to behave in socially unacceptable ways. These behavioral inclinations provide in turn the right conditions that give rise to suspicion and paranoia among those who lack power. From that perspective, it is counterintuitive that this very behavior fuels perceptions of power – individuals who break the rules gain power in the eyes of others and may even rise to actual power positions.

To illuminate these paradoxical findings, we adopted a multilateral approach that considered the social impact of the norm violator's action, the affordances of the cultural context, and the social standing of the perceiver. We proposed and showed that only norm violators whose actions have a positive impact on the group may be afforded power. Furthermore, we suggested that the psychological meaning and thus evaluation of norm-violating behavior may be contingent on the tolerance of deviance in a given society and the salience of the group in perceivers' self-concept. Norm violators may be seen as agents of innovative change and self-determination in loose and individualist cultures, and, as a consequence, they may be afforded power. Or they may be seen as advocates of disorder and segregation, and thus unworthy of power in tight and collectivist cultures. Finally, we demonstrated how the link from power to norm-violating behavior to power affordance may be an implicit mechanism that bolsters the hierarchical status quo. This vicious cycle of norm violations and power affordance may play a role in the emergence or continuation of a multitude of undesirable social and organizational behaviors, such as fraud, sexual harassment, and violence.

We consider the aforementioned ideas a particularly fruitful avenue for future research. This research could further our understanding of how norm violators rise to the top (Van Kleef *et al.*, 2011, 2012), why the

proportion of norm violators is consistently greater in the highest rank of the social hierarchy (Kraus, Piff, and Keltner, 2011; Piff *et al.*, 2012), and when norm violators can benefit societies and organizations by bringing innovative changes rather than harm them by getting bogged down into a power trip (Jetten and Hornsey, 2011).

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4 The leaders' rosy halo: why do we give power holders the benefit of the doubt?

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Political and military leaders cheating on their spouses. Heads of banks committing widespread fraud. Religious leaders hiding abuse in their ranks rather than reporting it to the police. From the famous statement by Lord Acton to modern examples of power holders lying, cheating, and stealing, it has become a truism that power corrupts those who possess it. Given this apparently repeated association of power and corruption, it should naturally follow for people to expect the worst from power holders. Indeed, laypeople seem to regard power itself as a topic inappropriate for polite conversation, and power-seeking behaviors as distasteful, potentially harmful, and presumably self-centered (e.g., Ng, 1980).

However, other evidence suggests that individuals' feelings about power and those who possess it are more nuanced. Though some power holders may be viewed with suspicion, many of them are admired, and individuals generally desire some degree of control in their own lives (e.g., Langer, 1975). We propose that, rather than being inherently suspicious of those in power, individuals are generally credulous towards power holders and see them in positive terms.

In the present chapter, we begin by examining power holders themselves, detailing the multiple possible origins of the idea that power corrupts and discussing research that suggests a more nuanced view. Then we shift focus to perceivers, first acknowledging ways in which perceptual patterns may foster associations between power and corruption and then presenting data showing that people might instead have a positive view of those in power as a default. We review several reasons why such a positive view is likely to be far more prevalent than is recognized. Finally, we discuss the implications of this "leaders' rosy halo" for both theorizing about power and real-life hierarchies.

Corruption as a function of the power holder

Given the ubiquity of the notion that power corrupts, we must first consider potential roots of this idea. One possibility is that power does

indeed corrupt those who possess it. In line with social-psychological and related research on power, we define power as asymmetric control over valued resources and outcomes (Emerson, 1962; Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson, 2003; Magee and Galinsky, 2008; Thibaut and Kelley, 1959). From this definition, it naturally follows that those who have power are more independent than those who lack it (cf. Lee and Tiedens, 2001). Perhaps this independence frees those with power to behave without concern for others (e.g., Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson, 2003). A random sampling of news headlines of the last year reveals multiple examples across numerous nations of bad behavior on the part of power holders. Indeed, much of the social-psychological research on power in the last few decades has also focused on the negative consequences of possessing power (see, e.g., Lee-Chai and Bargh, 2001). For example, Fiske (1993) proposed that powerful people stereotype their subordinates, both intentionally and unintentionally, whereas subordinates pay attention to those above them and seek individuating information about them (Goodwin, Gubin, Fiske *et al.*, 2000). Power has also been associated with other examples of antisocial behavior such as reduced perspective taking (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi *et al.*, 2006) and increased self-anchoring (Overbeck and Droutman, 2013), greater hypocrisy (Lammers, Stapel, and Galinsky, 2010), more negative evaluations of others (Georges and Harris, 1998), and less distress and compassion in response to another's suffering (Van Kleef, Oveis, and van der Löwe, 2008). In other words, the stereotype of the corrupt power holder might have its basis in reality.

However, the evidence for the corrupting nature of power is more mixed than is commonly thought. One problem is the often correlational nature of the data. In real life, individuals are rarely "randomly assigned" to powerful positions; they are selected by others to be elected or promoted to them. Unfortunately, various forces conspire to increase the likelihood that the wrong people ascend to power. It can be difficult to accurately assess the traits one would desire in a leader, and the cues often used as evidence for these traits may be misleading. In fact, sometimes these cues lead the worst people, rather than the best, to be promoted to powerful positions. For example, in one set of studies participants attained high-status positions in their social groups most often when they were active participants in the group discussion and thus appeared competent, even when private assessments revealed they were not actually competent (Anderson and Kilduff, 2009). Individuals who gain power but do not feel competent behave more aggressively towards others (Fast and Chen, 2009). Similarly, narcissists attain positions of leadership more often than nonnarcissists, in part because they

seem confident and authoritative (Nevicka, Ten Velden, De Hoogh *et al.*, 2011). Narcissistic leaders do not seek new information and otherwise tend to engage in risky and attention-grabbing behavior that leads to worse group performance (Chatterjee and Hambrick, 2007; Nevicka *et al.*, 2011). In this case, it is not that power corrupts, but rather that corrupt individuals may be more likely to obtain power and then are more able to behave badly due to the power they have been given. However, either case provides a realistic basis for the development of a belief that "power corrupts."

A more complex view of the power holder

Yet experimental power research also yields more nuanced results than the blunt conclusion "power corrupts." Power can lead to stereotyping when a stereotype is available and relevant (Chen, Ybarra, and Kiefer, 2004; Vescio, Snyder, and Butz, 2003), but power also leads to more individuation, with high-power individuals forming a more coherent, accurate representation of another's personality than low-power individuals (Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee *et al.*, 2008, Experiment 2; Overbeck and Park, 2001, 2006). Power leads to less perspective-taking in some circumstances (Galinsky *et al.*, 2006), but increased perspective-taking in others (Côté, Kraus, Cheng *et al.*, 2011; Schmid Mast, Jonas, and Hall, 2009). Power holders are posited to be cognitive misers, reserving their efforts for tasks that they deem worthy (e.g., DeWall, Baumeister, Mead *et al.*, 2011), yet those who have power frequently show equivalent or better performance on cognitive tasks than those who lack it (e.g., Overbeck and Park, 2001, 2006; Smith, Dijksterhuis, and Wigboldus, 2008a; Smith, Jostmann, Galinsky *et al.*, 2008b).

Such seemingly contradictory effects may result from the same underlying cognitive process. Because power creates a greater sense of social distance in those who possess it, power holders should, and do, engage in more abstract thinking than those who lack power (Huang, Galinsky, Gruenfeld *et al.*, 2011; Magee, Milliken, and Lurie, 2010; Smith and Trope, 2006; Stel, van Dijk, Smith *et al.*, 2012). The strength of this link is reflected in its bidirectionality: Thinking abstractly makes a person feel more powerful (Smith, Wigboldus, and Dijksterhuis, 2008c), and appearing to be an abstract thinker, such as by using more abstract language, leads others to perceive a person as being more powerful (Wakslak, Smith, and Han, 2013). Much of both the good and the bad behavior previously associated with power is a consequence of this increase in abstract thinking, as described in the social distance theory of power (see Magee and Smith, 2013, for a review). For example, abstract thinking leads to

more stereotyping when a stereotype is available (e.g., Chen *et al.*, 2004) and more individuation (i.e., representing individuals in terms of traits) when a stereotype is not available (e.g., Overbeck and Park, 2001). After all, both individuation and stereotyping involve generalization: individuation involves generalizing from specific behaviors performed by a target, and stereotyping involves generalizing from specific group memberships, but in both cases the resulting inference is assumed to represent a relatively stable characteristic of the target person. A critical consequence of the link between power and abstract thinking is that power reveals the person. That is, abstract thinking increases the correspondence between traits and behavior (Torelli and Kaikati, 2009), so that power holders behave more in line with their values and personalities than those below them. Thus, for example, power increases communal, selfless behavior in those who by nature are communal or have a strong moral identity, but decreases the same behavior in those who by nature are exchange-oriented or have a weak moral identity (Chen, Lee-Chai, and Bargh, 2001; DeCelles, DeRue, Margolis *et al.*, 2012). This also means power holders behave more in line with the goals they have (e.g., Guinote, 2007; Smith *et al.*, 2008b), and those goals can be prosocial or otherwise beneficial for their group, or antisocial or otherwise selfish (e.g., Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld *et al.*, 2008; Overbeck and Park, 2006; Karremans and Smith, 2010).

Of importance, the basic link between power and abstract thinking is functional, even if not all the consequences are desirable. Power holders, due to their elevated position, have the big-picture perspective and breadth of knowledge best suited to abstract thinking (in contrast to those below them, who generally possess a narrower range of information). At the same time, this high-level view inherently reduces emphasis on, or perhaps even perception of, the details. For example, a CEO, being responsible for an entire organization, may be attuned to its survival (financial performance), fundamental relationships (with external stakeholders, the board, regulators), and future goals. However, she may not be cognizant of how each of her decisions affects the activities, well-being, and security of each individual employee. As a result, the CEO may appear corrupt when those decisions create adverse impacts on members of the firm, even if risking the firm's survival would have potentially worse long-term effects on more people.¹

¹ Beyond the effects of a CEO's own processing style, CEOs must more often deal with major moral dilemmas than subordinates, by sheer nature of being the ones tasked with making important, impactful decisions.

Corruption as a function of the perceiver

Even if power holders are not actually more likely to exhibit corrupt behavior than those below them, various information-processing tendencies on the part of perceivers may nonetheless lead power holders to be seen as more corrupt. First, power holders, and thus their behaviors, receive increased attention from others due to the control they have over resources and outcomes. As Fiske (1993) detailed in her “power as control” model, subordinates need to, and generally want to, form detailed impressions of power holders in an attempt to better understand these people and predict their behavior. This heightened attention also occurs because power holders are viewed as the representative of their group or organization² (because the most prototypical group members frequently emerge as leaders, this can be logical; e.g., Hogg, 2001; see also Overbeck and Droutman, 2013). That is, they stand for the group itself, and thus, within a group context, they attract the most attention. Indeed, individuals' faces receive more attention and are better remembered when they are simply labeled as holding a high-status (vs. a low-status) job (Ratcliff, Hugenberg, Shriver *et al.*, 2011). Such heightened attention to power holders means more eyes are focused on their behaviors, both positive and negative, so their slip-ups are more likely to be noticed, not to mention broadcast to a wide audience (e.g., when a mail carrier cheats on his/her spouse, it does not make the front page). Furthermore, since negative information, particularly when it pertains to morality (e.g., Skowronski and Carlston, 1987), is processed more thoroughly, is remembered better, and has a greater impact on impressions of individuals than positive information (i.e., *positive-negative asymmetry* or *negativity bias*; see Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer *et al.*, 2001, for a review), once any corrupt behavior on the part of a power holder is noticed, it will have undue influence on how others view the power holder. That is, the salience of both power and negative actions is heightened, so that when the two co-occur, their effect on impressions is pronounced.

Second, because power holders and negative behaviors are distinctive, the two are more likely to be *erroneously* associated in people's minds. Since people show better recall for distinctive stimuli, distinctive individuals are particularly likely to be remembered when they do distinctive things. As a result, perceivers will overestimate the likelihood of these individuals performing that particular behavior, a phenomenon known as

² This role of being the group representative may also contribute to power holders being seen as corrupt. As representatives, power holders are often held responsible, both informally and formally, for any inappropriate or immoral behavior on the part of individual group members.

illusory correlation (Chapman and Chapman, 1967). Negative stereotypic beliefs may be supported in part by illusory correlations. Hamilton and Gifford (1976) presented participants with information about majority and minority group members performing positive and negative behaviors. They found that their participants overattributed negative behaviors to the minority group members, even though the ratio of the positive to negative behaviors in their studies was identical for the majority and the minority group. Power holders are not only more distinctive than those below them in the sense that they grab more attention, but they are also numerically distinct. In any given social group, high-power roles are ordinarily held by fewer individuals than are low-power roles. Therefore, observers will be likely to perceive a correlation between having power and behaving badly, even when no such correlation exists.

Finally, to the extent that perceivers have the expectation that “power corrupts,” they will be prone to construing situations in a manner that confirms their expectations (exhibiting confirmation bias; Snyder, 1984). Many decisions made by power holders involve trade-offs among competing interests and stakeholders. An outcome that is satisfying and clearly ethical to one group may seem hurtful and immoral to another. Due to their negative expectancies regarding power holders, perceivers may tend to focus on the more negative interpretation of power holders’ decisions, highlighting harms and failures while overlooking positive outcomes. Even when a decision is truly ambiguous, and neither harms nor benefits are clear, the lay belief that power corrupts may lead perceivers to assume that there must be some nefarious consequence soon to emerge.

The rosy halo: power casts a positive light on those who hold it

Given these reasons for having an association between power and corruption, it would not be surprising for individuals to assume that power holders are immoral and should not be trusted. Indeed, some evidence suggests that people do take a negative view of those who have power over them. For example, previous studies have found a negative association between supervisors’ power and both subordinates’ satisfaction (Bachman, 1968; Bachman, Smith, and Slesinger, 1966; Bruins, Ellemers, and De Gilder, 1999) and judgments of the supervisors’ likeability (Bruins *et al.*, 1999). However, we propose that this work – which has not specifically examined judgments relevant to *corruption*, per se – does not provide the final word. Instead, we propose that perceivers actually tend to regard the powerful, particularly those who have power over them, as *more* moral and *less* corrupt than those who are not especially powerful.

The notion that individuals view power holders in a positive light, particularly in regard to morality and ethics, may contradict prevailing beliefs, but past research provides several points of support. First, individuals generally prefer to believe that the world is just and fair and that people get what they deserve (e.g., the just-world hypothesis; Lerner, 1980). Similarly, system-justification theory holds that individuals are motivated, both consciously and unconsciously, to perceive existing social arrangements and institutions as just and legitimate (Jost and Banaji, 1994; Jost, Banaji, and Nosek, 2004). Acknowledging that one is forced to conform to the rules, norms, and conventions of a system that is illegitimate, unfair, and undesirable is likely to provoke considerable anxiety and threat (Kay, Gaucher, Napier *et al.*, 2008). When little can be done to change this reality, people will likely be motivated to justify their system to reduce these negative feelings and regain a sense of control over their environment (Kay, Whitson, Gaucher *et al.*, 2009b). Indeed, a study by Jost, Blount, Pfeffer *et al.* (2003) investigated ethical inferences concerning real and hypothetical companies and found that people generally believed that profitable companies are more ethical than companies posting losses. That is, those who achieved success must be deserving of it and can be trusted. In the current context, this research suggests that individuals, motivated to avoid uncomfortable feelings of threat, will be increasingly inclined to view an authority in a positive light as that authority's power increases. People may be motivated to perceive power holders as moral and ethical because such perceptions reassure them that the authorities who have control over their outcomes are benevolent and trustworthy.

System justification motives are particularly likely to be active in those low in power due to the nature of lacking power. Being subject to others' control is a generally aversive and threatening experience. There is often little low-power individuals can do about their situation, as those higher in rank control resources, outcomes, and the opportunities available to those below. Low-power individuals may have no choice but to accept the hierarchy. As such, these people are likely to adopt a system-justifying mind-set. In line with this idea, Kay, Gaucher, Peach *et al.* (2009a) found that individuals generally viewed existing power arrangements as more desirable than alternative arrangements, but this was especially true for those high in system dependence (the degree to which they felt their outcomes were dependent on the given system). Stevens and Fiske (2000) similarly found that evaluation-dependent individuals worked to form a positive impression of a power holder, discounting negative information about him or her. Thus, the more an individual feels dependent on and vulnerable to particular power holders – the more power the power

holders wield over this individual – the more motivated the individual should be to view them in a positive light, trusting them more to do the right thing and generally showing more support for them.

If subordinates are assuming morality on the part of power holders in part to legitimize their situation, then explicit legitimacy information should moderate this effect. When individuals are explicitly told that a power holder obtained his or her position through illegitimate means, system justification becomes futile: The hierarchical relationship is overtly unjust and unfair. The illegitimate power holder will then not benefit from the “rosy halo” normally obtained via system justification. Instead, these power holders will need to provide evidence of their moral credentials.

Another possible explanation for the “leaders’ rosy halo” follows from the previously mentioned association between power and attention. High-power individuals attract more attention than low-power individuals (Ratcliff *et al.*, 2011). Due to diffusion of responsibility (Darley and Latané, 1968), with so many eyes likely to be watching, individuals may assume that someone else will be monitoring the power holders, so they feel little need to obtain direct evidence of power holders’ behavior themselves. After all, if power holders are so prominent and visible, someone is likely to be keeping an eye on them, so they should be less likely to behave immorally. That is, the powerful may be seen as more moral not only because of perceivers’ motivation to see them as such but also because perceivers simply assume that power holders lack the latitude to transgress, even if they wanted to, because all eyes are on them.

Finally, the disconnect between the maxim “power corrupts” and our arguments that perceivers likely see power holders as moral may reflect the general disconnect between evaluations of a group and evaluations of any one of that group’s individual members. In a classic study of the relationship between intergroup attitudes and behavior towards out-group members, the sociologist Richard LaPiere traveled with a Chinese couple around the USA in the 1930s, when there was widespread prejudice against Asians. Over the course of the trip, only one out of 251 hotels and restaurants refused to serve the couple. However, when LaPiere later contacted managers at the same hotels and restaurants and asked if they would serve a Chinese couple, over 90% of those who responded said they would not (LaPiere, 1934).

It seems that general attitudes towards a group are often a poor predictor of behavior towards specific individuals (e.g., Azjen and Fishbein, 1977). In the case of power holders and morality, why might individuals err on the side of perceiving individual power holders more positively than power holders in general? Individual power holders are close to us:

Our outcomes are determined by them (Magee and Smith, 2013). This level of closeness and dependency makes it difficult to view them so negatively (e.g., Stevens and Fiske, 2000). Furthermore, individuals know more specific information about any one particular power holder than about power holders in general. The presence of more information about an individual group member, especially information that is irrelevant to the stereotype of the greater group, weakens the relationship between attitudes towards the group and behavior towards the individual, particularly when the individual is a member of an out-group (Fein and Hilton, 1992). Thus, because subordinates tend to know individuating information about those who hold power over them, they will be less likely to apply a general "power corrupts" stereotype to these individuals and instead will view them more favorably.

Consistent with this argument, Critcher and Dunning (2013) showed that perceivers tend to expect more moral behaviors from an individual than from the population that individual is a part of. Specifically, a randomly selected individual (e.g., an undergraduate at one's university) was thought more likely to engage in moral or selfless behaviors (e.g., giving money to the homeless) than the full population (e.g., the entire student body). Similarly, Sears (1983) found that perceivers rated individual politicians (e.g., specific US senators) more positively than politicians in general. In like manner, we suspect that individual power holders may be seen in positive moral terms even as the "power corrupts" group stereotype persists.

Evidence for the rosy halo

Little work has explicitly examined how perceivers regard the powerful, but a recent series of studies offers support for our arguments. Overbeck, Tost, and Wazlawek (2013) asked participants to directly report their impressions of power holders' moral character – the holding of moral values and willingness to act on those values (cf. Hogan, 1973) – and found consistent evidence contradicting the "power corrupts" perspective. In an initial online experiment, participants were asked to imagine a single target person. The only information participants were given about this person was that he or she possessed either a low-power or a high-power position in an organization. Power was explicitly defined in terms of control over the distribution of valued resources and decision-making about personnel. Participants then rated this target person on eight different attributes, all relating to moral character (e.g., "X models ethical conduct," "X lacks a strong moral compass"). In contrast to the common belief that power is associated with corruption, participants rated the

high-power target person as being significantly higher in moral character than the low-power target person.

Of course, this experiment used very minimal descriptions and asked about a hypothetical target, which may elicit different responses than specific real-life power holders. Thus, Overbeck *et al.* (2013) next sought to test the relation between power and moral judgments in the context of real authorities and organizations. In a follow-up study, they took advantage of the presence of a variety of high-power individuals in an executive education class on leadership to see how these real-life power holders were perceived by the employees who reported directly to them. In this survey, the direct reports rated their supervisor's level of power and his/her moral character (e.g., "takes responsibility for doing what is right," "argues for high ethical standards"). Replicating the results of the first study, this study found that the more power the supervisor had, the more he or she was judged to have high moral character.

How far does this assumption of morality go? That is, to what extent do individuals give power holders the benefit of the doubt? Overbeck *et al.* were interested in the degree to which this assumption of morality on the part of power holders might substitute for other signs of trustworthiness. Transparency – the open provision and availability of information regarding decision-making – can act as a heuristic for gauging someone's moral status. Not only does transparency allow for greater surveillance of a person's behavior to ensure the person complies with moral norms, but the willingness to be transparent serves as a signal that the person plans to comply with these norms in the first place. Thus, the more a perceiver knows about the processes and reasons behind a person's decisions, the more easily the perceiver should be persuaded that this person is behaving in line with moral norms (Rawlins, 2008). However, if a perceiver is predisposed to view the authority as moral for reasons separate from transparency, then the authority's transparency is likely to be less critical in determining judgments of morality. That is, when the perceiver already has other reasons for presuming the authority to be moral, transparency is a less essential signal, both because in such a situation transparency offers little new information diagnostic of the authority's morality and because surveillance is seen as less necessary. Therefore, if power holders are by default assumed to be moral, whether or not they are transparent regarding their decision-making processes will have less impact on judgments of their morality: Even a tight-lipped power holder will be judged as relatively moral.

In the second study, participants also rated their supervisor's transparency in terms of the provision of explanations for decisions (i.e., "is careful to explain his/her decisions," "explains how decisions are

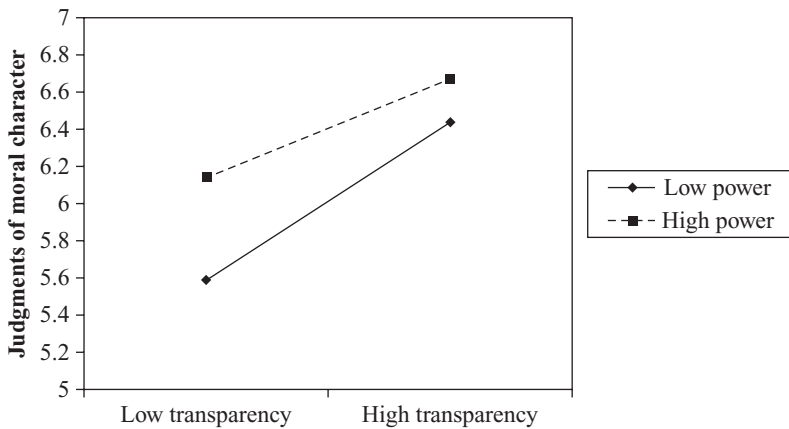


Figure 4.1 Effect of supervisors' power and transparency on judgments of their moral character.

made”). Transparency was positively related to judgments of the supervisor's moral character, but this was moderated by an interaction with the supervisor's power. There was a stronger positive effect of transparency when supervisors were perceived as having a low rather than a high level of power (see [Figure 4.1](#)). Though being transparent also helped high-power supervisors to be judged as more moral, it did not help them as much as low-power supervisors. In fact, they did not need the boost: High-power supervisors who were low in transparency were still judged to be relatively moral.

One important implication of these effects regards the degree to which subordinates support their supervisors. Trust in the moral integrity of a colleague is a key determinant of support for him or her (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002). Transparency, as it increases perceptions of a colleague as moral, should increase support for that colleague (Norman, Avolio, and Luthans, 2010). However, if an observer is predisposed to perceive power holders as moral and ethical, transparency should have less of an effect on support because it provides the observer with little new information regarding the power holder's worthiness for support. Indeed, when participants indicated the degree to which they evaluated their supervisor positively (e.g., “is an exceptional leader”), there was a significant interaction between power and transparency. Again transparency had a stronger effect when supervisors were perceived as having a low rather than a high level of power (see [Figure 4.2](#)). Notably, although high-power supervisors with high transparency were judged most positively,

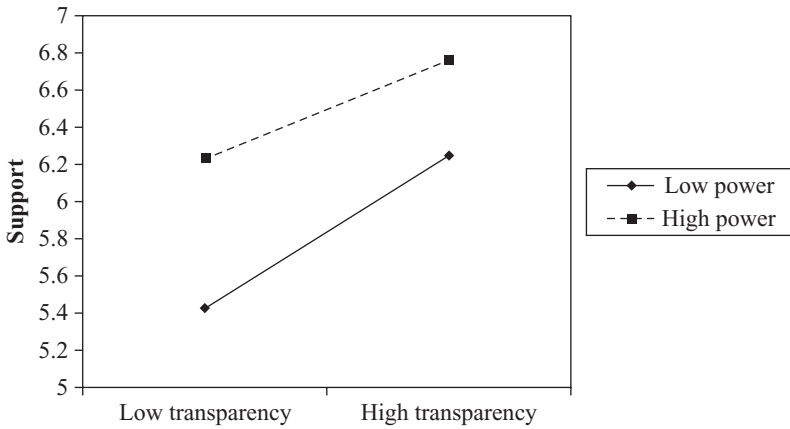


Figure 4.2 Effect of supervisors' power and transparency on support for them.

high-power supervisors with low transparency were still judged at least as positively as low-power supervisors with high or low transparency. Further analyses revealed that these effects were partially mediated by perceptions of moral character. In other words, high power appears to foster perceptions of morality, and these perceptions lead to increased support on the part of subordinates, even in the absence of transparency.

Across both an experiment involving hypothetical targets varying in power and a field survey involving subordinates and supervisors in ongoing power relationships, Overbeck *et al.* (2013) found that more powerful individuals were judged to have higher moral character. Furthermore, this assumption of the greater morality of power holders was strong enough that high-power individuals did not need to be transparent regarding their decision-making processes to be seen as moral and to receive support from their subordinates. Rather than “power corrupts,” people seem to assume that “power purifies.”

Overbeck *et al.* (2013) further tested the boundaries of perceivers' credulity by examining university students' reactions to ostensible budget cuts at their university. All participants read a description of a fictional person, Mark Jones, supposedly the university's head treasury officer (HTO), who was said to be leading a budget-cutting and allocation process at their university. In these descriptions Mark varied in terms of the power he held, the legitimacy of his position, and his transparency about recent decisions. Mark was described as having either low power (e.g., “there are a lot of restrictions on his authority”) or high power

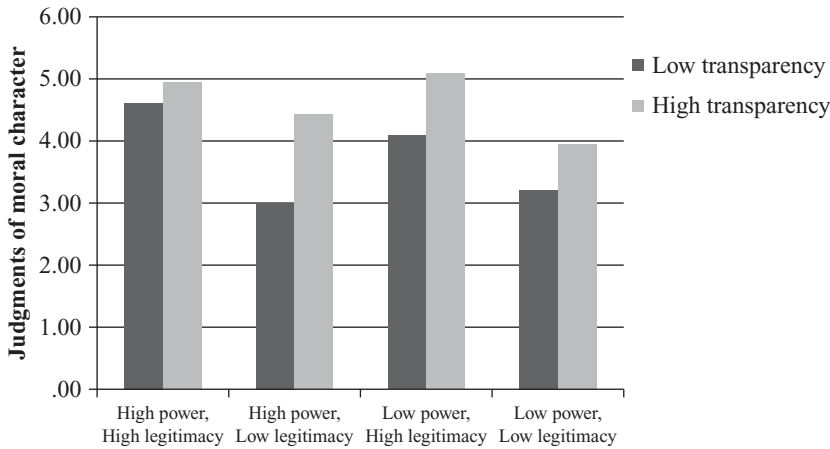


Figure 4.3 Effect of supervisors' power, legitimacy, and transparency on judgments of their moral character.

(e.g., “he can essentially make the decision without any restrictions on his authority”). He either had “not much experience in this area” and was appointed by a family member to the position (low legitimacy), or had “extensive experience and a long list of accomplishments” and was elected to his position democratically (high legitimacy). Finally, he either had been providing “very little information” about recent decisions (low transparency) or had “issued a report providing extensive details about these decisions” (high transparency). After reading the description of Mark, participants rated how much morality-related descriptions (e.g., “ethical,” “selfish”) applied to Mark and how much they supported Mark (e.g., “I’m comfortable looking to Mark Jones for leadership”).

As predicted, the effect of transparency on judgments of Mark’s moral character depended on Mark’s level of power and the legitimacy of that power (see Figure 4.3). As in the previous study, more transparency was always beneficial for Mark when he was low in power, regardless of the legitimacy of his position, and transparency did not matter when he had high, legitimate power, as he was then always viewed as being high in moral character. However, when Mark’s power was high yet illegitimate, things changed: Here he was viewed as being higher in moral character the more transparent he was. Once participants had clear evidence that Mark’s position could not be justified, they could no longer default to viewing him as moral and instead needed concrete evidence of his

character. Similar effects were found on the amount of support participants were willing to give Mark.

Conclusions and implications

On the surface, the idea that “power corrupts” seems to be taken as a given, trotted out by journalists and newscasters anytime a leader behaves scandalously. In this chapter, we attempted to bring some nuance to this blunt generalization. First, we demonstrated how power does not necessarily have a corrupting effect on individuals, but rather that both positive and negative effects may stem from the same basic, functional cognitive mechanism of power holders’ greater abstract thinking (Magee and Smith, 2013). We also explained how the distinctive nature of having power can lead power holders to appear to be more immoral, even when they are not behaving any worse than everyone else.

Second, we discussed why, despite the apparent ubiquity of “power corrupts,” people might instead default to assuming that an individual power holder, especially one who directly wields power over them personally, will actually be more moral than someone lacking in power. Assuming by default that power holders are moral and thus can be trusted and supported may help low-power individuals cope with the threatening nature of their position. Indeed, when power holders clearly do not deserve the position they hold, they again need to provide evidence that they are behaving ethically before they are seen as moral and ethical. The attention that power holders grab may lead others to assume that power holders will behave morally because they are being watched. Additionally, people may still hold the stereotype that power holders in general are corrupt, but various cognitive processes lead this stereotype not to be applied to specific power holders.

Third, we discussed data supporting this idea of the “leader’s rosy halo.” One consequence is that power holders have less of a need to demonstrate they are indeed behaving ethically (e.g., by being transparent) in order to be seen as moral and ethical.

This chapter offers a number of theoretical and practical contributions. To begin, we hope to push the discussion of what power does to those who possess it further away from black-and-white debates of “it’s bad” versus “it’s good,” to more nuanced considerations of exactly what power does to people, when, and why. Power is a fundamental dimension of human relationships and a primary method of organizing social relations (Cartwright, 1959; Fiske, 1992). Hierarchies often facilitate coordination, reduce conflict, and satisfy the human need for order and stability (Magee and Galinsky, 2008); in other words, they persist in part because

they are functional. If all power holders were by definition corrupt, the world would quickly dissolve into chaos. Furthermore, proposing that power is inherently bad may be seen as its own form of system justification, a way of letting those without power feel that they actually are in the better position (Kay and Jost, 2003).

Next, we echo many recent researchers in emphasizing the importance of putting the right people into positions of power (e.g., Galinsky *et al.*, 2008). Power reveals the person. It gives power holders external support to pursue their goals by providing access to resources and removing barriers and constraints (Keltner *et al.*, 2003). It also gives power holders internal support by helping them ignore distractions and stay goal-focused (DeWall *et al.*, 2011; Guinote, 2007; Smith *et al.*, 2008b). It is thus critical to select, for positions of power, people who hold the sorts of goals that are most beneficial for the group (e.g., Karremans and Smith, 2010; Overbeck and Park, 2006). In this way, one can be more certain that power holders will indeed "do the right thing." This certainty is especially important given that people's default appears to be not to check for hard evidence of right- or wrongdoing on the part of power holders.

We also extend existing research on how status and power differences affect social judgments (e.g., Fragale, Overbeck, and Neale, 2011) by demonstrating that individuals do not always make negative assumptions about power holders. The studies of Overbeck *et al.* (2013) demonstrate that power is positively associated with judgments of moral character and diminished needs for transparency. Such a pattern stands in stark contrast both to previous literature and to scholarly and popular discourse. Given the surprising nature of these findings, follow-up research is necessary to determine the underlying mechanisms of this effect, as well as potential boundary conditions. Recent research has shown that, when individuals' sense of personal control is threatened, they respond in a compensatory manner by heightening their sense of external order and control; among other things, they tend to bolster their sense of the legitimacy of authorities (Kay *et al.*, 2009b), consistent with our findings.

Finally, our arguments – and the evidence supplied by Overbeck *et al.* (2013) – underscore an important caution: Credulity towards the powerful creates vulnerability. With legitimately acquired power, an actor can behave more freely, with fewer constraints and less demand for transparency. Yet this very freedom may foster less moral behavior, as suggested in recent work by Lammers and colleagues (2010) and Gruenfeld and colleagues (2008). As such, organizations would be well served by implementing formal systems that preserve transparency and compensate for members' natural tendency to forgo monitoring of the powerful.

Abraham Lincoln has been quoted (probably erroneously; Leidner, n.d.) as saying, "If you want to test a man's character, give him power." Similarly, we argue that power can be associated with corruption or morality, depending on the character of the power holder and the circumstances under which he or she holds power. And, despite the common belief that power corrupts, individual perceivers judging individual power holders tend to show trust, credulity, latitude, and support towards the powerful. This may ease the burdens of subordinate status among all those who lack power, but, sadly, it does little to prevent the kinds of abuse reviewed at the start of this chapter.

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5 “Power corrupts” revisited: the role of construal of power as opportunity or responsibility

Kai Sassenberg, Naomi Ellemers, Daan Scheepers, and Annika Scholl

With the recent financial crises the stereotype that power corrupts returned to public discussion. The news media have often asked why bankers took such high risks to increase their personal income while they seemingly ignored the responsibility resulting from the fact that others' savings and pensions depend on the bankers' behavior. Indeed, the definition of power as the asymmetrical control over others' outcomes might suggest that those in power primarily consider the *opportunities* social power represents. But is it true that power holders mostly overlook the *responsibility* resulting from the fact that they can provide or withhold others' access to desired outcomes? Do they forget that those low in power depend on them, or are vulnerable to the effects of their actions? And does this depend on individual preferences in terms of interest in power and the motivation to achieve power in the first place?

The present chapter provides an answer to these questions about the construal of power as opportunity and responsibility, in three steps. First, we review research providing insights into whether power leads to self-serving behavior (i.e., making use of the opportunity power provides) or to the consideration of others' perspectives and interests (i.e., the responsibility for others), in order to answer the question of whether there is a truth in the stereotype that power corrupts. This review will be embedded in a brief summary of the main theoretical approaches to power in social psychology. Second, we introduce the distinction between the construal of power as opportunity versus responsibility and current research on the impact of construal of power on interest in power. These studies provide an answer to the question of whether the construal of power as opportunity is indeed what motivates people to strive for power in the first place – if so, that would provide a reason why power is in many cases treated as opportunity (i.e., leads to more selfish behavior). Third,

we summarize research addressing (the preconditions of) the construal of power as opportunity and responsibility, as well as its implications for the actions of the powerful. These sections suggest that there is no need to be paranoid about the powerful under conditions that cause power to be perceived and exercised primarily as responsibility, instead of opportunity. The chapter is completed by a section summarizing the latest research on the meaning of power as opportunity versus responsibility, and pointing to avenues for further research.

From power to responsible action

Psychological research on the impact of power on individuals' own behavior originates mostly in one of two traditions: the group-dynamic approach and the sociocognitive approach.

The *group-dynamic approach* developed taxonomies of resources (e.g., rewards, expertise) by which people can gain control over others (e.g., French and Raven, 1959). Studies examined how these resources relate to interpersonal influence in natural and simulated groups (Emerson, 1964; Kipnis, 1972). This work suggested that people generally covet power (Mulder, 1977) and attempt to take over higher-power positions (Bruins and Wilke, 1992). The introduction of power differences easily disrupts harmonious social relations, because those high in power tend to devalue the performance of those low in power and attribute their effort to the influence of the powerful rather than to powerless individuals' motivation (i.e., objectification – Kipnis, 1972). Moreover, power holders tend to use their power to facilitate individual goal achievement at the expense of others (Ng, 1980).

These insights still dominate current views on the social implications of power. However, scholars have argued for a reappraisal of insights on power, in the light of novel theoretical and methodological developments (e.g., Haslam, 2004). In line with this, it has been shown, for example, that the attraction of power is limited to certain motivational states (Sassenberg, Brazy, Jonas *et al.*, 2013; Sassenberg and Scholl, 2013) and that the impact of power on action is also dependent on power holders' social motivation, as will become evident from the summary below (e.g., Guinote, Weick, and Cai, 2012). In addition, the group-dynamics approach has paid relatively little attention to the psychological processes underlying the effects found – for example, the crucial role of the way in which power is cognitively construed.

The *sociocognitive approach* to power has yielded new methodological developments (e.g., priming, implicit measures), studied intraindividual processes underlying power, and manipulated rather than measured power to be able to draw conclusions about causality. Hence, the key

characteristics of this approach made up for the limitations of large parts of the group-dynamics approach. In addition, the sociocognitive approach comes with a shift of the focus from structural differences in actual power to cognitively represented differences in power. This allows also for a more differentiated approach concerning the understanding (i.e., the construal) of power that lies at the heart of our own research presented below.

The theoretical approaches dominating this research are the approach/inhibition theory of power (AITP) (Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson, 2003) and the situated focus theory of power (SFTP) (Guinote, 2007a, 2010). Both theories focus on the self-regulatory implications of high and low power. AITP suggests that high power leads to the activation of the behavioral approach system, and low power leads to the activation of the behavioral inhibition system, because the control among the powerful implied by their power reduces the requirement to care about restrictions and regulations suggested by the environment, whereas the lack of control among the powerless requires that they adjust their behavior in line with the guidance provided by the powerful. Due to the impact on the approach and the inhibition system, elevated power elicits a readiness to act. Individual motivation and inner experiences (e.g., feelings) guide the powerful more than the powerless.

Focusing more on information processing than on the motivational and psychological underpinnings, SFTP contains a slightly nuanced main prediction. It suggests that those in power are guided to a stronger extent by their current attentional and self-regulatory focus. In other words, high power allows individuals to do what is foremost in their minds, whether this results from situational influences or long-term goals. In contrast, those low in power suffer from less goal-focused information processing and action regulation, and this might ultimately result in lower goal achievement. SFTP argues that this outcome of power results from the fact that the powerful (due to their elevated control) can concentrate better on their current agenda, whereas those low in power always need to pay attention to potential threats and interventions by those high in power (Guinote, 2007a, 2010).

In essence, both theories agree that the powerful show more uninhibited goal-directed or approach-related action and are less likely to be distracted by the environment. Numerous findings support these predictions. For instance, compared to those low in power, the powerful act more (Anderson and Berdahl, 2002), show stronger approach tendencies (Maner, Kaschak, and Jones, 2010), are less influenced by environmental cues (Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld *et al.*, 2008), and are more focused in their goal striving (Guinote, 2007b; Slabu and Guinote, 2010).

All in all, this provides pervasive evidence that power leads to a strong focus on one's own goals – and this is certainly selfish in a way. But what about the impact of power on considering others and their needs? Despite the fact that both AITP and SFTP do not directly speak to interpersonal issues in general or to responsibility in particular, they allow us to derive predictions in the interpersonal domain due to effects on information processing. The fact that the powerful tend to focus on themselves and need to care less about others suggests that they will invest less in perspective taking (Fiske, 1993). Indeed, there is evidence that the powerful show less empathy or reciprocal emotions (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi *et al.*, 2006; Gonzaga, Keltner, and Ward, 2008; Van Kleef, Oveis, van der Löwe *et al.*, 2008; Wolpin, Corneille, Yzerbyt *et al.*, 2011). Consistent with this finding, those high in power, compared to those low in power, rely more on stereotypes (rather than individualizing information, e.g., Fiske, 1993; Guinote and Phillips, 2010; Guinote, Willis, and Martellotta, 2010), are less influenced by others (Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld *et al.*, 2008; Van Kleef, De Dreu, Pietroni *et al.*, 2006), behave less altruistically due to greater perceived social distance (Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn *et al.*, 2012), and consider the powerless merely as a means for goal attainment (i.e., they show objectification; Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee *et al.*, 2008). In addition, when they are of low status the powerful behave in less inhibited (e.g., more aggressive; Fast and Chen, 2009; Gonzaga *et al.*, 2008) and more demeaning ways towards others (Fast, Halevy, and Galinsky, 2012).

Overall, these findings suggest that power does indeed lead to more selfishness and less responsibility. Together with the conclusion from the group-dynamics tradition, this suggests that power can indeed corrupt or at least tends to lead to self-centeredness and a focus on one's own goals and opportunities rather than on others' interests and concerns. However, early social cognitive research on power, directly addressed the question of whether power corrupts and provided evidence that this is *not true* – at least not across the board. Overbeck and Park (2001) found that when making decisions about their own and others' outcomes, power holders individuated others more than did those low in power. Hence, when others are on the agenda of those high in power (due to task requirements), the powerful do direct attention to these others. Moreover, Galinsky, Gruenfeld, and Magee (2003) predicted in line with AITP that high-power individuals tend to act more – no matter whether it is to their own benefit or not. Supporting this hypothesis, they found that individuals primed with high (compared to low) power not only *took* more resources out of a common good for themselves but also *contributed* more of their own resources to a common good. Thus, power does not necessarily lead to more selfish behavior (see also Schmid Mast, Jonas,

and Hall, 2009) but it does lead to more focused and less inhibited behavior, as indicated by SFTP and AITP.

This initial work suggested that merely studying the main effects of power does not allow us to capture the complexity of the effects of power. Therefore, recent research took a person–situation interaction approach. Studies addressing, for example, the moderating effect of individuals' social-value orientations on the effect of power found that those with a strong prosocial orientation show more perspective taking, the more power they have, whereas those low in prosocial orientation think more selfishly when they are in power (Côté, Kraus, Cheng *et al.*, 2011; for similar findings, see Blader and Chen, 2012; DeCelles, DeRue, Margolis *et al.*, 2012). These findings are in line with SFTP: the powerful (but not those low in power) follow their generic dispositions. However, this only happens when the situation does not provide strong guidance for behavior (i.e., under these circumstances personal traits set the agenda of the powerful). However, if the situation does provide clear guidelines for behavior, power holders are influenced more than the powerless by situationally activated goals, to the extent that these apply to the situation at hand (for evidence, see Guinote *et al.*, 2012).

In sum, many studies have shown that power can induce selfish tendencies and lowered concern about the thoughts and motives of others, which seem to result from the independence power provides and the tendency to uninhibited action. This indicates that some paranoia about the powerful seems to be justified. More recent evidence, however, has revealed that the effects of power are not uniform. If individuals are oriented towards others – whether this is due to chronic tendencies, situational activation, or goals – stronger power leads to more prosocial behavior. This provides the first evidence that the *in situ* construal of power deserves more attention. Put differently, how power holders construe their power in a given situation may explain differential effects on their behavior to others. The next section first introduces the construal of power as opportunity versus responsibility. After that, we summarize research on the question of how the construal of power relates to individuals' striving for power – that is, whether individuals are primarily attracted to power because they construe it as opportunity (this would in turn also render selfish behavior after getting into power more likely).

The construal of power as opportunity or responsibility and its impact on the attraction of power

The key element in scientists' definition of power (and, therefore, in the current working definition mentioned above) is the asymmetrical control over one's own and another person's outcomes (Fiske and Berdahl,

2006). Researchers have differentiated forms of power along several dimensions. French and Raven (1959) already suggested that social power can be based on a variety of the resources that power holders control (e.g., expertise, rewards). Overbeck and Park (2001) proposed that the asymmetry in control might imply either that one has power over others or that one is free from others. While these approaches address *different forms* of power, our aim here is to provide insights into the pre-conditions and consequences of different *construals* of the *same form* of power.

Making use of the asymmetrical control over others' outcomes (i.e., one's social power) offers an opportunity to reach one's own goals, but it also elicits the responsibility to consider how this impacts upon others' goals. This has long been acknowledged in research on the power motive (e.g., Winter and Barenbaum, 1985). For instance, not only does a fund manager handling billions of euros have the opportunity to increase her own bonus in case of successful speculations, but she is also responsible for the investors' savings and pensions.¹

We have argued that social power "objectively" provides opportunity and responsibility at the same time. However, social power does not necessarily raise *perceptions* of both implications to the same extent. In the case of the fund manager making investments, the perception of power as opportunity to achieve her own goals might predominate. In contrast, parents' and teachers' power over children and pupils tends to be conceived as responsibility for their children's and pupils' well-being. Moreover, also in (other) professional environments, some power holders construe their power as responsibility – for instance, when managers consider their subordinates' needs, or journal editors take care to handle fairly the submissions they receive (Chen, Lee-Chai, and Bargh, 2001).

The way in which power is construed might affect the attraction of power in the first place. When power is primarily construed as opportunity, the elevated control implied by power can be used to pursue one's *own* goals and interests. In this case, gaining power is expected to ease the access to desired states. When, by contrast, power is construed as responsibility, the outcomes of lower-power others become a concern of the (potentially) powerful person. This might be seen as a potential additional requirement to be fulfilled, rendering power less attractive. Therefore, we predicted that power is less attractive when construed

¹ We prefer this terminology of power construed as opportunity versus responsibility over the labels "personalized" and "socialized" power (e.g., Torelli and Shavit, 2010, 2011), because of potential confusion with personal and social power (as used by Lammers, Stoker, and Stapel, 2009), which describe different *forms* of power.

as responsibility than when it is construed as opportunity (Sassenberg, Ellemers, and Scheepers, 2012).

To test this prediction, we conducted several experiments in which we directly manipulated the construal of power as opportunity versus responsibility. To this end, we applied a mind-set-priming procedure. Participants imagined being a member of an organizing committee for a sports event. In this powerful role, they evaluated certain measures. In the opportunity-mind-set condition, this evaluation was concerned with the contribution of these measures to the *success* of the event, whereas in the responsibility-mind-set condition it was concerned with ethical *responsibility*. The attraction of power was always assessed as part of an ostensibly unrelated study. In two experiments, participants were asked to think of a high-power group and a low-power group of their choice within an organization that both had medium status. Then, they rated their interest in becoming a member of each of these groups. In line with the hypothesis, interest in membership in high-power groups was stronger than interest in membership in low-power groups when power was construed as opportunity, but not when power was construed as responsibility. Thus, the construal of power as responsibility substantially reduced the impact of the power position of the group on group attraction (i.e., it reduced the attraction of power). This finding held when controlling for individuals' exchange and communal orientation. This effect is in line with the research reviewed above, showing that situational cues that activate relevant goals can overrule interindividual differences in relational orientation, while the latter mainly guide behavioral preferences in more ambiguous situations.

An additional experiment using implicit measures indicated that the impact of construal of power on the attraction of power holds not only for group power but also for *individual* power (e.g., roles). A final experiment further examined the processes underlying the differential attraction of power. Our argument that power construed as opportunity is more attractive relies on the assumption that it is seen as facilitating goal achievement. Therefore, we reasoned that, in particular, individuals who are eager to achieve their goals should be attracted by power construed as opportunity. Regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997) defines a promotion focus as a motivational state in which individuals eagerly accomplish their goals. Therefore, we predicted that the more strongly individuals focus on promotion, the more they should be attracted by high power when it is construed as opportunity (vs. responsibility). This prediction was tested in an experiment designed to replicate the preceding study, and to assess individuals' chronic regulatory focus. In line with predictions, in the power as opportunity condition individuals with a stronger promotion

focus were more attracted to power; this relation was not found in the power as responsibility condition.

Together, these experiments demonstrate that power construed as opportunity is more attractive than power construed as responsibility. This suggests that individuals usually try to attain power due to its potential positive impact for the achievement of their own goals. To the extent that this specific interest in power increases the likelihood that these individuals will become powerful, this result would indeed be a reason to become somewhat paranoid about those in power. But is it also possible that individuals in Western cultures construe their power in terms of responsibility? Under which conditions is this the case, and what are the behavioral consequences?

When power is construed as opportunity versus responsibility

The majority of findings summarized above found heightened self-centeredness among power holders. This suggests that the majority of the power holders construe their power as opportunity. Research on power and culture provides some insights into why this pattern of results predominates in power research. It suggests that the self-centeredness of those high in power has been found in sociocognitive power research, at least in part due to the method used (i.e., power priming) and the *social context* in which the research has been conducted (Western cultures). Both aspects render a construal of power as opportunity more likely. Zhong, Magee, Maddux *et al.* (2006) have argued that the relational values predominant in Western and in East Asian cultures might have a different impact on the spontaneous construal of power. They assumed that valuing independence leads to a conceptualization of power “around influence and entitlement in the West, with behavior assertively driven towards satisfying oneself. In contrast, East Asians conceptualize power around responsibility and tend to consider how their behavior affects others” (Zhong *et al.*, 2006, p. 53), due to the strong endorsement of interdependence in these cultures. Zhong and colleagues studied the semantic concepts Westerners and East Asians associated with power and indeed found that Americans of European descent spontaneously associate power more with opportunity, whereas Asians and Asian-Americans associate power more with responsibility. This provides the first direct evidence for the impact of culture on the construal of power and explains why, in studies conducted with European and American participants and relying on the spontaneous conceptualization of power, the opportunity meaning prevails.

Relying on similar arguments, Torelli and Shavitt (2010) provided more direct evidence that relational values associated with cultures influence the construal of power. In a series of studies, they found evidence that individuals endorsing vertical individualism (i.e., individuals striving to be better than others) see “power as something to be used for advancing one’s personal agenda and . . . powerful status.” In their studies, vertical individualism was associated with accepting misuse of power more, with higher social dominance orientation (i.e., acceptance of hierarchies), and with more selfish behavior. In contrast, horizontal collectivists (i.e., individuals valuing subordination to groups and authorities and engagement in favor of the in-group) perceive “power as something to be used for benefiting others” (p. 717). Horizontal collectivism was associated with more prosocial behavior and the motivation to use one’s power to help others. These findings suggest that vertical individualists see power holders as entitled to focus on their own goals and outcomes. They are thus more likely to construe power as opportunity. In contrast, according to horizontal collectivists, power holders need to care about other people’s concerns and outcomes and, therefore, seem to construe power rather as responsibility. According to these findings, the powerful should be more likely to be corrupted (i.e., to act in a selfish way) in vertical individualist cultures than in horizontal collectivist cultures.

Based on these findings, research priming social power in Western and, thus, mostly vertical individualist samples (i.e., most of the sociocognitive power research to date) will produce findings that apply when power is construed as opportunity (i.e., the common construal of power in these societies). Torelli and Shavitt (2011) provided evidence for this notion. They demonstrated that when primed with power, vertical individualists, but not horizontal collectivists, show more stereotyping (i.e., a sign of power holders’ self-centeredness that has also been reported in earlier research on the impact of power; cf. Guinote and Phillips, 2010; Guinote *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, research priming power in Western cultures – in other words, activating the predominant spontaneous construal of power as opportunity – will most likely not reveal what happens if the powerful focus on others and, thus, construe power as responsibility.

But there is also empirical evidence identifying some of the preconditions of the construal of power as responsibility in *Western* cultures. The research showing that (within Western cultures) the impact of power on selfish versus prosocial behavior depends on individuals’ traits already indicates that some members of Western cultures tend to construe power as responsibility. In line with this notion, Chen *et al.* (2001) were the first to demonstrate that the consequences of different types of goals that individuals associate with power depend on their relational values. To

the extent that individuals had a communal orientation (Clark, Ouellette, Powell *et al.*, 1987), they were expected to primarily consider the responsibility associated with power (Chen *et al.*, 2001). In contrast, power holders with a strong exchange orientation (Murstein, Wadlin, and Bond, 1987) were expected to associate power with their own opportunities. Indeed, Chen *et al.* (2001) found that when primed with social power (vs. a control) individuals with a stronger communal (vs. exchange) orientation behaved with more social responsibility towards other individuals and showed a greater concern for social approval. Hence, interindividual differences alter the construal of power within the same social context.

However, as indicated by the examples of teachers and parents above, the construal of power might be affected not only by the long-term social context (i.e., culture and interindividual differences) but also by the more *immediate* social context. In our own research, we aimed to provide evidence for this assumption by focusing on a social-structural variable – namely, group status (Scheepers, Ellemers, and Sassenberg, 2013). The standing of their own group, organization, or system – in which some individuals have high power and others have low power – should affect the construal of power and hence impact upon the willingness of those in power to take risks on behalf of their group. That is, we argued that broader concerns about the status of one's own group affect the behavioral opportunities and outcome expectations of individual group members. A group with low status has nothing to lose and only something to gain. A power holder in this group may thus be willing to try even risky ways to improve the status of the group. In contrast, in a group with high status, both the low-power members and the powerful belonging to this group have a lot to lose (namely, their status) and not so much to gain. When group goal achievement is at stake, the relatively higher risk of losing when the group has high (vs. low) status should render a construal of power as responsibility more likely. Within a business simulation, participants received randomly determined feedback concerning their company's performance after a first round of decisions that indicated either high or low company status. Subsequently, participants learned that in the second round they would be in a high power role (CEO) within their company and make all relevant decisions. Afterwards, participants rated the responsibility their power implied. Power holders in high-status groups were more inclined to construe their power as responsibility than those in low-status groups, as anticipated. Furthermore, they tended to make less risky (i.e., more prevention-focused) decisions on behalf of the group. Thus, the construal of power as responsibility does indeed depend on the social context providing the power.

In sum, the research summarized in this section suggests that, in Western cultures, the construal of power as opportunity is the default way to

perceive power, providing a basis for the paranoia about the powerful. However, if the social context and the goals made salient therein raise power holders' concerns about others and their needs, power is construed as responsibility also among Westerners.

Conclusion

The present chapter revisited the question "Does power corrupt?" by a review of three bodies of literature: (1) the work on the impact of power on selfish and other-oriented behavior, (2) research on the impact of construal of power on the attraction of power, and (3) research on the preconditions of the construal of power as opportunity versus responsibility.

The first body of literature – on the impact of power – suggests that power leads to selfish rather than to responsible behavior. However, there is also some evidence that points in the opposite direction. This inconsistency is resolved by recent studies suggesting that when situations are weak or ambiguous (as stated by Snyder and Ickes, 1985), the impact of individuals' chronic relational orientation is accelerated by social power. However, strong situational cues can raise specific goals or concerns that overrule these individual tendencies. Thus, the situation in which power is embedded ultimately determines the impact of power on selfish versus other-oriented behavior, and this offers scope for regulations aiming to suppress selfish tendencies among those in power.

The second body of research on the impact of construal of power on attraction of power adds that attempts to gain access to power may be primarily driven by the opportunities it seems to provide. This is likely to be a relevant motive especially for those who are eager to achieve their goals, and this may be a cause for paranoia about the powerful. If we assume that those who are especially interested in gaining access to power are more likely to end up having it, power holders are likely to use the opportunities thus gained primarily to advance their own interests. Our research on construal of power offers hope that there is scope to curb such pernicious effects. That is, emphasizing the responsibilities that come with power might less easily attract individuals to such positions in the first place, but is more likely to attract them for socially responsible rather than selfish reasons. This shows the crucial importance of considering – and if necessary adapting – individuals' construal of power towards responsibility rather than only seeing it as opportunity.

The third body of research on the role of social context in shaping the construal of power found that in Western/vertical individualist cultures and among exchange-oriented individuals, power is spontaneously construed as opportunity, while, in East-Asian/horizontal collectivist

cultures and among communal-oriented individuals, power is mostly construed spontaneously as responsibility. This also explains why many studies using power priming (i.e., spontaneous power construal) in Western samples find that power raises selfish behavior. Future research should therefore carefully consider whether this type of work offers an adequate image of how power is actually construed in the context to which the findings are to be applied. To put it more simply: also in Western cultures, there are specific domains, such as learning and education, where power is likely to be construed in terms of responsibility rather than opportunity. Therefore, the results from priming research relying on spontaneous construals of power as opportunity do not necessarily inform conclusions about the use of power in these contexts. To address these potential limitations, future research should not only manipulate the experience of power but also consider the construal of power within a situation. Our own studies provide initial evidence that earlier findings on the effects of power actually speak to power construed as opportunity, but that different effects are obtained if power is construed as responsibility (De Wit, Scheepers, Ellemers *et al.*, 2012). This illustrates another limitation of prior research revealed in this review – namely, that research so far has barely assessed directly the construal of power (for exceptions, see Scheepers *et al.*, 2013; Zhong *et al.*, 2006). Future research might consider doing so and thereby gain insights into the understanding of the mechanisms underlying the impact of power on selfish and responsible behavior.

And after all that – does power really corrupt? We have seen that selfish behavior can be raised by power. However, this is only the case if the context suggests that it is appropriate to apply power in selfish interests or if an individual obtaining power has such selfish motives. Power does indeed strengthen these motives, and selfish action becomes more likely. We have also concluded that horizontal individualists are likely to construe power as opportunity, and this is what makes power seem attractive in the first place. All in all, this suggests that, ultimately, the corrupt go for power rather than that power corrupts.

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II

Politics

6 Never trust a politician? Collective distrust, relational accountability, and voter response

Susan T. Fiske and Federica Durante

Voters are good at detecting phonies. A google search for “fake” and the name of a losing American presidential candidate the day after the election yielded cynical comments about his fake tan, his staged charity, his fictive heritage, his fraudulent polls, and his rigged voting machines. The winner did little better, but, on average, polled as more motivated to serve the interests of middle-class voters. The candidate–voter dynamic depends on politicians being trusted not to put their own self-interest (gaining and keeping power) over that of the voters who elect them. We argue here that trust is a critical – if not the critical – judgment that voters make.

Every few years, voters evaluate candidates, and political leaders result. Much ink, many minutes, and even more bytes analyze elections both formally (political science) and informally (public media). But elections are about people, and social psychologists know a lot about people. We come to this project as social psychologists interested in how people make sense of individuals as group members and groups as society members. As we will show, politicians are acknowledged to be powerful, but are disliked and distrusted around the world.

We argue that the politician-versus-citizen distrust depends on a failure of relational accountability, citizens’ lacking trust in politicians’ shared intentions. Politicians have a goal to get and maintain power, and voters have a goal to elect politicians who will represent their interests and adopt competent policies. Knowing for sure only that a candidate wants to win power, voters must infer whether the candidate genuinely cares about anything else, and, if so, represents their long-term shared interests. Apparently most politicians consistently fail on this dimension.

We will first present background on one model to analyze political person perception, based on fundamental dimensions of social cognition, and then present evidence for the role of affect that results from these perceptions and determines people’s vote. We close with some comments about relational accountability.

Fundamental dimensions of social cognition

Foreshadows

In 1946, Solomon Asch asked students about two different people, both described as competent (*intelligent, skillful, industrious, determined, practical, cautious*), but one as *warm* and the other as *cold*. Those two central warm–cold traits entirely determined the meaning of the competence-related traits in the overall impression. In this demonstration, Asch showed that warmth and competence are two critical dimensions of impression formation. Open-ended descriptions of the warm and cold person indicate that this central dimension includes being trustworthy: generous, good-natured, wise, humane, and altruistic.

Years later, a more systematic study of trait adjectives in impressions used multidimensional scaling of representative trait adjectives to identify the underlying dimensions: social good–bad and intellectual good–bad (Rosenberg, Nelson, and Vivekananthan, 1968). The social dimension anchored on warm, sociable, good-natured, sincere, trustworthy, honest, and their opposites; the intellectual dimension anchored on skillful, persistent, industrious, scientific, and their opposites. Around the same time period, small-groups research identified leaders as being either social or task oriented (Bales and Slater, 1955), again affirming these two similar dimensions.

Candidates

Into this context came our early project on political person perception. At the time, political behavior research was focused on party identification as predicting American voters' choices. Some of us, meddling social psychologists (Abelson, Kinder, Peters *et al.*, 1982), saw election campaigns as a case of mass person perception, millions of voters all forming impressions of the same few candidates. Would the same principles apply? Would traits sort on these different dimensions? And what would be their consequences for feelings and behavior?

In one study, voters rated the current presidential candidates (Carter, Ford, Edward Kennedy, Reagan) on sixteen traits (eight positive, eight negative): courageous, warm, honest, smart, humble, knowledgeable, open-minded, inspiring, immoral, too political, selfish, weak, reckless, unstable, power-hungry, and prejudiced. In another, they rated Carter, Edward Kennedy, Reagan, Connally, Baker, and George H. W. Bush on a subset of six traits and trait-like behaviors: moral, dishonest, weak, knowledgeable, power-hungry, inspiring, solve our economic problems,

provide strong leadership, and develop good relations with other countries. In a separate analysis, we found these traits to sort on a competence factor and an integrity factor (Kinder and Fiske, 1986) related to Rosenberg *et al.*'s two factors. Traits – competence and warmth together – predicted voting behavior even controlling for issue stands.

Since that time, similar trait dimensions have appeared in citizens describing the Polish president and qualities missing in politicians in general (Wojciszke and Klusek, 1996), related to Wojciszke's broader model of morality (trustworthiness) and competence in person perception. Similar dimensions described a typical US congressman before and after a scandal (Funk, 1996), both American and Italian presidents (Caprara and Zimbardo, 2004), and US presidents (Popkin, 2012).

Groups in society

Theories often stem from multiple sources, of which their developer is only half-conscious. Fifteen years after participating in the candidate-perception studies, Fiske developed a model of ambivalent sexism with Peter Glick (e.g., Glick and Fiske, 1996), positing hostile and subjectively benevolent biases towards different kinds of women. In retrospect, hostile sexism targets were stereotypically competent but cold women (female professionals), whereas benevolent sexism targets were stereotypically warm but incompetent women (housewives). Implicit in this ambivalence, then, is a trade-off between the two fundamental dimensions.

Soon after, Fiske (1998) was searching for a way to systematize a more general discussion of out-groups in society, and the nice-but-dumb versus smart-but-cold distinction seemed to fit many groups. This stereotype-content model contradicted the prevailing notion that out-groups are stereotyped as either entirely good or entirely bad. Soon, studies suggested that people do sort all kinds of societal groups along the two warmth and competence dimensions (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick *et al.*, 2002).

First, members of society ask themselves, does this group (e.g., new immigrants) intend good or ill to me and my group? If they have good intentions, they are warm and trustworthy; otherwise, exploitative and untrustworthy. Their intentions are inferred from their perceived cooperative or competitive stance, an understanding of social structure open to political framing and misperception, of course.

Second, having an impression of the group's intentions, people seek to know whether the group can enact them – namely, their apparent competence. Competence is inferred from perceived status (economic success, prestige).

This warmth \times competence space accommodates various cultures' groups, all over the world (Cuddy, Fiske, Kwan *et al.*, 2009; Durante, Fiske, Kervyn *et al.*, 2013; see [Figures 6.1–6.6](#)). Related frameworks exist, but this one builds most explicitly on prior person-perception work, applied to societal groups (Cuddy *et al.*, 2008; Fiske *et al.*, 2007).

Most relevant here is the fact that politicians appear in several countries' listing of groups that matter to their society. How are politicians viewed, and what does this mean for reactions to them?

Politicians in the warmth by competence space

In this framework for examining social groups, some international samples rate politicians as part of a competent-but-cold cluster (with rich people, for German-Swiss and French-Swiss), others rate them in an incompetent-and-cold cluster (with disreputable scum, in Italy, India, Mexico), and some rate them as low warmth but in-between competence (Portugal). In all cases, politicians as a group are rated as not warm and sincere, not-us.

Closer examination led us to notice the relationship between our data and the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), in which 0 means that a country is perceived as highly corrupt and 10 means that a country is perceived as very clean. In Switzerland, politicians are perceived as competent but cold and CPI = 8.8. In Portugal, where politicians are perceived as of middling competence, CPI = 6.1. In Mexico, India, and Italy, politicians are low on competence, and CPI = 3.0, 3.1, and 3.9, respectively. So, at least concerning politicians, perceptions of competence seem related to perceptions of corruption, while warmth/trust are not (conversely to what one might expect, but all politicians score low on that dimension, so it has no variance) (see Chirumbolo and Leone, this volume).

A detailed look conveys some specific impressions. In the French-Swiss sample ([Figure 6.1](#)), politicians appear alongside competent-but-cold rich people, Jews, Muslims, immigrants, young people, and unemployed people. Politicians emphatically do not share the in-group space with Swiss people in general, Italian-Swiss, French-Swiss, German-Swiss, the middle class, students, generic men and women, Protestants, Catholics, or even atheists. Politicians, though definitely not trusted, are not incompetent, a space reserved for drug addicts, Gypsies, and asylum seekers.

For the German-Swiss sample ([Figure 6.2](#)), politicians appear alongside rich people and managers, but outside the warmer in-group cluster,

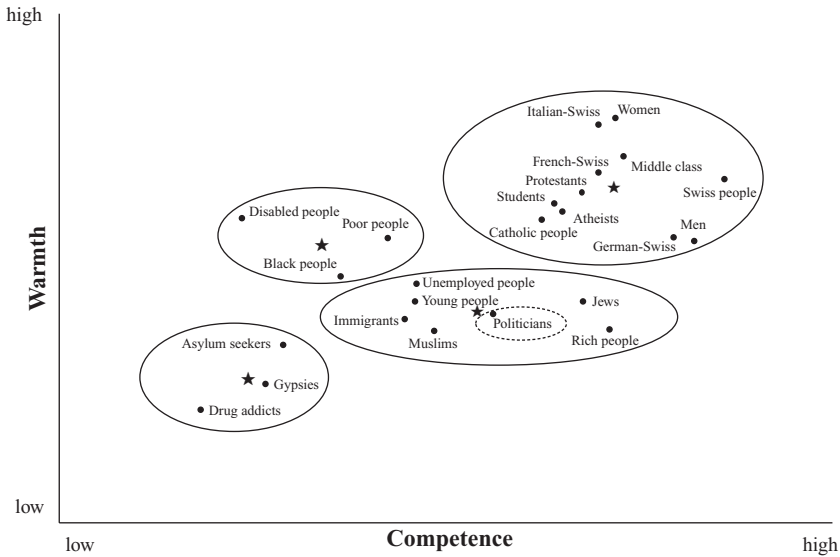


Figure 6.1 French-Swiss sample. Politicians appear in the dashed ellipse, competent but cold. Stars indicate cluster centers.

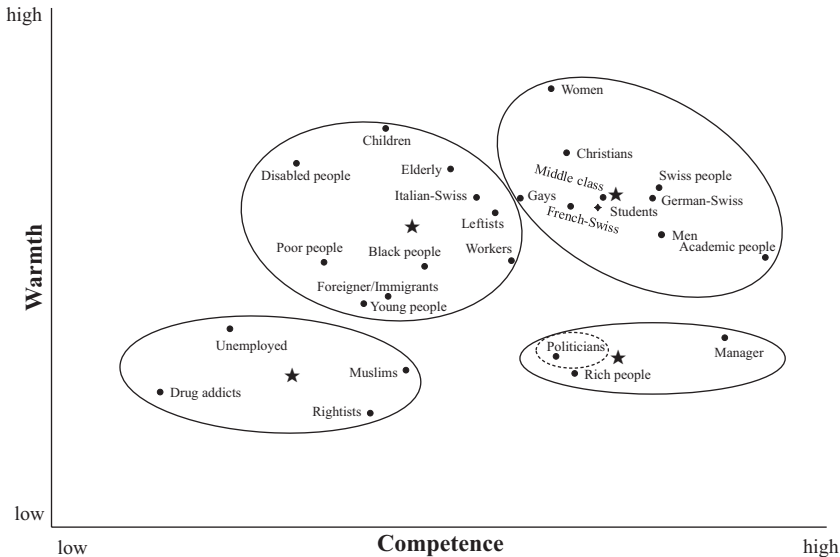


Figure 6.2 German-Swiss sample. Politicians appear in the dashed ellipse, competent but cold. Stars indicate cluster centers.

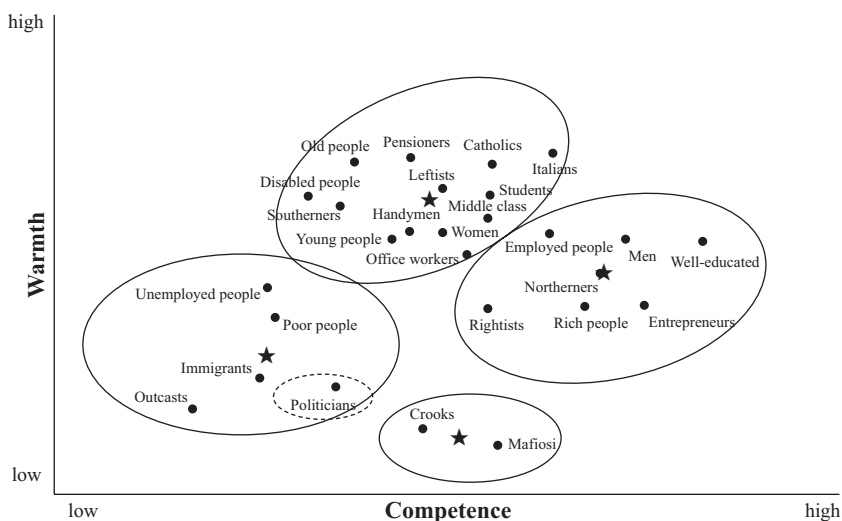


Figure 6.3 Italian sample. Politicians appear in the dashed ellipse, both incompetent and cold. Stars indicate cluster centers.

which contains Swiss people in general, German-Swiss, French-Swiss, students, academics, generic men and women, the middle class, and even gays. The worst out-groups, drug addicts, the unemployed, Muslims, and rightists, are more incompetent than politicians but just as low on warmth; in other words, politicians are just as mistrusted as society's outcasts. In both Swiss samples, then, politicians appear with rich people and entrepreneurial groups, thought to be competent, but not trusted as on "our side."

Italian politicians also are mistrusted, and they do locate among the worst out-groups, alongside outcasts, immigrants, poor, and unemployed. But they are not far from the more competent but still mistrusted crooks and Mafiosi (Figure 6.3).

Likewise, in India, politicians are the lowest of the low, below even the unemployed, the uneducated, day laborers, and the scheduled castes (formerly Untouchables). No other groups come even close to such negative reactions (Figure 6.4).

Similarly, Mexican politicians seem no better than their culture's least competent and trustworthy: pampered prep-school "fresas" (strawberries) and gay men (Figure 6.5). All three of these cultures view politicians with distrust, specifically contempt, but evidently with somewhat different cultural meanings.

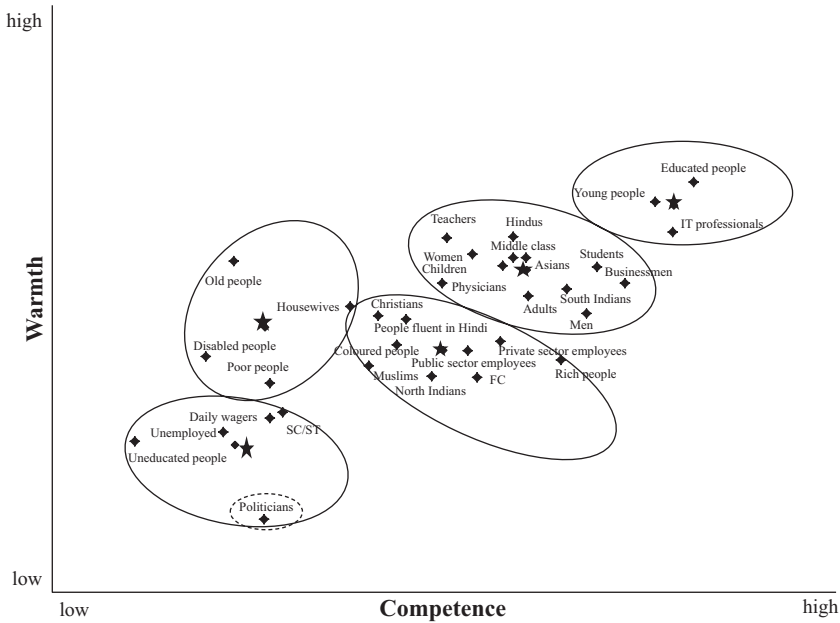


Figure 6.4 Indian sample. Politicians appear in the dashed ellipse, both incompetent and cold. Stars indicate cluster centers. FC: Forward Caste (not eligible for positive discrimination or other related government benefits); daily wagger: day laborer; IT: information technology; SC/ST: Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe, formerly known as “Untouchables,” now eligible for positive-discrimination quotas.

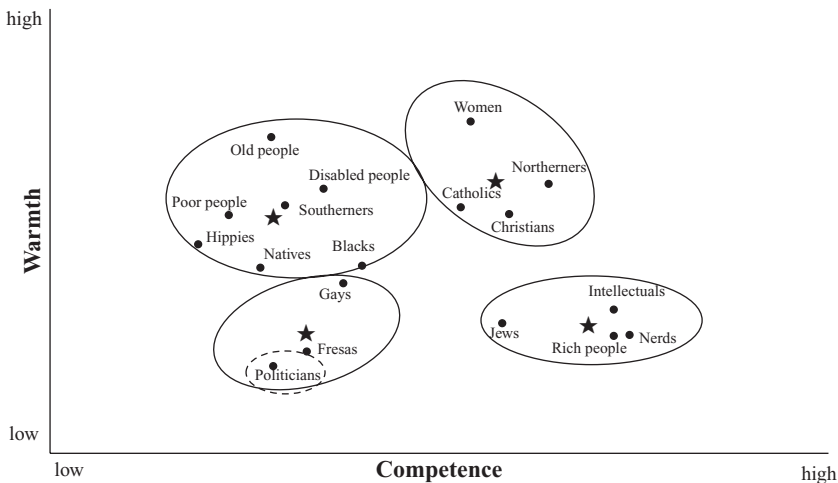


Figure 6.5 Mexican sample. Politicians appear in the dashed ellipse, both incompetent and cold. Stars indicate cluster centers.

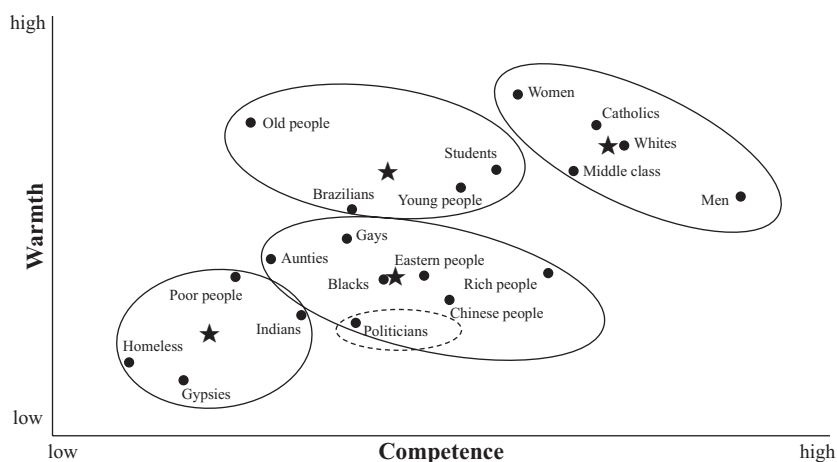


Figure 6.6 Portuguese sample. Politicians appear in the dashed ellipse, slightly competent but cold. Stars indicate cluster centers.

The remaining country where respondents had nominated politicians as a culturally significant group was Portugal (Figure 6.6), where the politician image falls between these least-competent and most-competent images, while sharing the universal distrust and perceived low warmth. Portuguese politicians seem slightly more competent than Gypsies, poor people, immigrants, and Indians. They locate in the same cluster as rich people and entrepreneurial people (Chinese people, Eastern people, Black people), as well as gays and “aunties” (rich relatives, women from fancy neighborhoods who are not necessarily rich but are very snobbish). None of these groups are trusted, and none of them are as competent as the cultural in-groups (the middle class, Whites, Catholics, generic men and women).

So in these varied cultures around the globe, each map of society places politicians squarely in the low-trust or low-warmth half of the space, sometimes more competent and sometimes less, but never the societal in-group. Whatever happened to “our leaders”?

Affect matters

Part of the story appears in our emotional reactions to politicians. Next we examine the role of emotion in reaction to the universally distrusted politicians. As we will see, emotion matters because it predicts political behavior.

Warmth, competence, emotions, and behavior

The stereotype-content model predicts that stereotypes provoke emotion. By this model and evidence from a variety of social groups (e.g., Cuddy *et al.*, 2009; Fiske *et al.*, 2002), the societal in-group part of the space (high warmth, high competence) evokes pride and admiration. Politicians as a group thus are not a source of pride.

Groups seen as well intentioned but incompetent (e.g., disabled or older people) evoke pity, but politicians as a group are nowhere seen as well intentioned. So pity seems unlikely.

Instead, they land in the untrustworthy half of the space, which evokes resentment and anger, overall. Specifically, ill-intentioned groups elicit disgust and contempt if they are low status and allegedly incompetent: poor people, drug addicts, the homeless, and immigrants, in many places – and politicians in Italy, Mexico, India, and maybe Portugal. Other ill-meaning groups elicit envy and jealousy if they are high status and allegedly competent: rich and entrepreneurial people, in many places – and politicians in German and French Switzerland. Neither disgust nor envy is a good set of emotions.

Both emotions directed at distrusted groups (disgust, envy) predict active harm, attacking, and fighting – not a good prognosis for politicians. The disgusting ones would also elicit passive neglect, whereas the envied ones would elicit passive association (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick, 2007). Neither sounds like a ringing endorsement for re-election. Gaining trust, then, would seem to be a candidate's biggest task.

Importance of affect for politicians

Emotion-related reactions such as trust have a history in political psychology. Going back to the Abelson *et al.* (1982) political-person-perception project, the trait impressions of candidates did predict voting preference, but affects were even stronger predictors. Affects, positive and negative separately, together predicted overall candidate evaluations and vote intentions, adding significant variance beyond trait impressions and party identification.

Participants in both studies were asked a question about each candidate (four in Study 1, six in Study 2): Has [candidate], “because of the kind of person he is or because of something he has done, ever made you feel [in Study 2] afraid? angry? disgusted? uneasy? hopeful? proud? sympathetic?” (Study 1 asked also about disliking; being frustrated, sad, or happy; and liking, but these were later dropped.) The most striking initial finding came from the ten separate factor analyses (one for each candidate).

In every case, positive and negative affects loaded on independent factors. Over time, the extent to which a candidate has made a voter hopeful, proud, and sympathetic is unrelated to how much the candidate has also made that voter feel afraid, angry, disgusted, and uneasy. The trick for a successful candidate, then, is to make voters feel positive emotions, and not to feel negative ones. The independence of positive and negative affect turns out to be common in attitudes (Cacioppo and Berntson, 1994) and in mood (Watson and Tellegen, 1985).

In the 2008 Obama–McCain election campaign, hope, pride, and fear clearly mattered (Finn and Glaser, 2010). When in-depth histories are written, emotions will likely be shown for the 2012 US election as well. Certainly, between the variously studied elections, affect has mattered separately and at least as much as trait impressions (to sort decided and undecided voters' preferences in a Texas gubernatorial race: Christ, 1985; to predict US presidential elections in 1972, 1976, 1980, and 1984: Granberg and Brown, 1989; student voters' reactions to national political figures: Jones and Iacobucci, 1989; and approval of Presidents Carter and Reagan: Ragsdale, 1991).

The primacy of affect in predicting reaction to politicians echoes affective primacy in other domains, such as racial stereotypes and emotional prejudices predicting racial discrimination (Talaska, Fiske, and Chaiken, 2008) and the importance of affect in intergroup reactions more generally (Mackie and Smith, 1998). But is this a good idea for democracy?

Role of emotions in decisions

Emotional decisions are not necessarily irrational. In a related domain, automatically activated attitudes are adaptive, helping people to decide efficiently what to approach and what to avoid (Fazio, Sanbonmatsu, Powell *et al.*, 1986). In the 1984 US presidential race between Reagan and Mondale, attitude accessibility was the crucial mechanism, mediating the relationship between attitudes and perceptions of debate performance, as well as between attitudes and voting (Fazio and Williams, 1986). Easily activated evaluations – and doubtless emotions – help voters to interpret and act effectively.

Beyond attitudes, affect matters much of the time. Emotion-based responses are often adaptive (Pham, 2007); integral emotions (evoked by a target) indicate its value, promoting responses that are efficient, consistent, definitive, present-focused, magnitude-insensitive, and relativistic. Emotion-based decisions provide, for better or worse, a secure foundation. Emotional reactions to a shared target – as in political campaigns – elicit high consensus across people and high consistency over

time. Because emotions also regulate moral and prosocial behavior, they are arguably adaptive, at least sometimes. According to Bou Zeineddine and Pratto (this volume), mistrust in powerful others, particularly those who constrain others' options and means of attaining and maintaining well-being, or who use their power to harm other people, can be adaptive.

On the plus side, emotions seem to promote social and moral behavior in organizations as well. For example, feeling good at work increases participation and organizational citizenship (George and Brief, 1992). Political engagement likewise entails not only political expertise but also participation and strong feelings (Miller, 2011). The role of emotion in political decision-making is even broader, of course (Westen, 2007).

To be sure, individuals differ in how much they respond affectively versus cognitively (Huskinson and Haddock, 2004). Attitudes, as well as person impressions, also vary in their affective versus cognitive basis, accordingly being open to persuasion by that respective route (Edwards, 1990; Edwards and von Hippel, 1995). Transitory campaign contexts (e.g., balloons) but also candidates themselves vary in their ability to signal emotions (Isbell and Ottati, 2002). President Reagan was a master at sending emotions and evoking these emotions in his audience (McHugo, Lanzetta, Sullivan *et al.*, 1985). Voters' individual expertise and motivation moderate how readily they respond to these emotional cues (Isbell and Wyer, 1999; Ottati and Isbell, 1996). So accessible affect admittedly varies across voters, candidates, and issues.

Recap

If politicians as a group are distrusted, evoking resentment and anger, sometimes contempt and sometimes envy, then overcoming those negative emotions must concern any political candidate who wants to become a political leader. We suggest that because politicians apparently pursue their own interests, not "we the people's," the voters view them as typically competitive, exploitative, and therefore untrustworthy.

Our analyses fit some others here: Sassenberg, Ellemers, Scheepers, and Scholl (this volume) argue that power provides an opportunity to reach one's own goals. In their chapter they address the question "What is the role of the construal of power as opportunity and responsibility in the striving for power?" Andeweg (this volume) holds that distrust is high in almost every country where it was measured. However, Smith and Overbeck (this volume) propose that, contrary to popular belief, people assume the best of powerful individuals: Power holders are seen as more moral than the powerless. Ours and related hypotheses suggest research yet to be done.

Relational accountability

We know what politicians want: By definition, as a job requirement, they want power, control over resources to advance their goals. To get there, they have to persuade us, the voters, at least temporarily, that they share our goals. They seem to know that the middle class are society's ideal, so they often claim those values. They typically avoid advocating support for people without a fixed address, who are resented and do not vote (homeless people, undocumented immigrants, drug addicts), and they typically avoid advocating support for people with too many addresses, who are also resented (rich people, outsider entrepreneurs).

The problem for us as voters is that we know the politicians' goal is to win our vote by appearing to be trustworthy and on our side, but once they have what they want (our vote), they may leave us. In close-relationship terms, one might see this strategy as seduce-and-abandon. In a confidence game, it would be scam-and-scam. Even if we assume for a moment that they do genuinely share our goals, how do they show this, given that other candidates pretend the same? Trustworthiness is difficult to prove, as it requires unwavering loyalty over time, with even one betrayal destroying trust.

What is needed is political trust stemming from relational accountability, specific political leaders demonstrating specific loyalty to us and credibly explaining their lapses. One way politicians can win trust is exactly by demonstrating consistency over time to their constituents. Indeed, we trust our own specific, local representatives more than politicians in general (Sears, 1983, Studies 8–11, Table 4). We know more about them, perhaps having more face-to-face interactions. Certainly, we know their faces, backgrounds, and personalities better than we do the generic politician. This gives us (and the particular politicians) the opportunity to moderate our extreme distrust of them.

The principle of worthy intentions fits other political/social entities. For example, corporations are treated as intentional agents with self-serving or public-serving goals (Kervyn, Fiske, and Malone, 2012). They win or lose customer loyalty accordingly. Sellers, beware!

Conclusion

Our take on the problem of politicians, power, and paranoia is to argue that in their competition for power, politicians forfeit voters' trust. Voters are not paranoid to distrust politicians, once one analyzes the respective goals of politicians and voters. What is more, we are at their mercy more than they at ours; the dependence is asymmetrical. In equal-power

relationships, trust is adaptive, but in asymmetrical ones, especially those with such high stakes for the common welfare, trust must be earned. Our collective good sense tells us not to trust them until proven not guilty.

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7 Political distrust: the seed and fruit of popular empowerment

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Most people in the world today can expect to eat better, learn more, and live longer than any of their known ancestors. Yet, for many, especially for members of disadvantaged groups and states, trust in domestic political leadership and institutions is low. This irony – that greater material empowerment is accompanied by greater distrust – can be explained by a nuanced understanding of power, the psychology of trust, and the sociopolitical dynamics of contemporary societies.

This chapter describes the social psychology of people's power situations and of their responses to those situations, specifically in relation to standards for, and orientations towards, governments. In doing so, we use a different theoretical conception of power than other scholars often use. In particular, we insist that dominance and outcome control – or *power over* – are insufficient conceptions of power because they disregard both relational and material resources that are supplementary to whatever influence an agent wields over another. Further, framing power simply as power over another neglects the needs, motivations, and agency of those in lower-power situations or positions. Instead, we argue that the relations of people with their social ecology are fundamentally entangled in the concept of power, which we view as the combination of the psychological, relational, and material affordances and constraints that characterize people's lives. And if power is the set of affordances and constraints a social agent's existence is shaped by, then trust is one important *gauge* of the balance of affordances and constraints for a social agent versus another's in the context of their direct and indirect social interactions. Because people do engage in social comparison processes and learn vicariously about who is trustworthy, several social-psychological processes inform how trust or distrust is produced.

We explicate these ideas as follows. First, we offer our reconsideration of power and trust, and say how our theoretical perspective pertains to

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political distrust in particular. We explain why we expect political distrust to be higher among people in disadvantaged situations compared to their past and to people in advantaged situations, particularly those historically advantaged. Second, we argue that objective empowerment across groups and countries leads to changes in political cultures and aspirations. This then begets political distrust, which in turn catalyzes both resistance among the disadvantaged and reform among the advantaged. Third, we show how these changes vary in their magnitude and effects, in accordance with the institutional and elite behavioral constraints and norms prevalent across different kinds of government. Finally, we discuss what political distrust means for popular empowerment and the democratic ideal, and offer suggestions regarding further research and theory.

Our analysis of power begins simply with the recognition that all people have survival needs. To take action to meet survival needs, people must sense what they need, and what the environment affords, based on both past and present experiences and situations. They must rely on the aspects of the environment within their reach, as well as on their own capabilities, to get what they need to live. Power and trust both have fundamentally to do with these processes.

Complexities enter our analysis when we recognize that environments afford the meeting of needs differentially to different persons and groups. Confronted with needs and with inequality in the ease of meeting needs, people try not only to meet their needs but also to adapt to or change their social, economic, and political environment so that they can do so. Thus, power and trust relations are dynamic.

Power-basis theory defines power as the potential that social agents have to fulfill their basic needs and to enable or obstruct the fulfillment of others' needs (Pratto, Lee, Tan *et al.*, 2011). In other words, the ease with which the agent's needs can be met or that others' need fulfillment can be influenced, stemming jointly from the local environment and one's capacities, indicates how empowered the agent is. This conception of power focuses on empowerment and disempowerment as fluid in time, rather than as power *over* another. This definition of empowerment does not mean activation of effective self-striving or of devolution or distribution of influence only, but also incorporates the empowerment inherent in authoritarian benevolence and material provenance because power is due to the relation of need to social ecology.

Different kinds of power address different specific survival needs. As such, our conception of power includes material resources such as wealth and control over force, and relational utilities such as social belonging and legitimacy. Indeed, power-basis theory holds that these kinds of

power are interlinked and fungible (Pratto *et al.*, 2011). For example, wealth, a “material” resource, is an important determinant of social and political status and influence (e.g., Gill and Law, 1993). And contrary to the assumption that certain needs are less survival oriented and thus less basic in the hierarchy of needs, the relationship is reciprocal. As a case in point, and consistent with our social-ecological analysis, social and political status can facilitate or hinder accumulations of wealth (e.g., Lucero, 2008). Through this lens, one can see that material and relational types of power are strictly entangled, with both serving both biological imperatives and higher-purpose goals. After all, people must access both material and relational resources through other people. Human beings are not self-sustaining, self-fertilizing producer organisms like the plants. We humans are consumers and social animals, and, as such, the social properties and positions of human agents are just as fundamental to meeting survival needs as the availability of resources is (e.g., Lemieux and Pratto, 2003). In fact, in locations where material abundance is highest, there is often the most necessity for relational types of power, as many victims of colonization and exploitation could testify.

Trust is the gauge of how much another agent will not obstruct, or will facilitate or enable one’s needs to be met, or has done so in the past; distrust indicates that the other will hinder or prevent need fulfillment or increase neediness. In other words, trust/distrust is an integrative evaluation of the agent’s needs, the environment’s affordances of those needs, and the combination of the power and benevolence of other social agents. We would like to emphasize the integrative part of this definition. Power asymmetry between agents alone is an insufficient basis for distrust. Power asymmetry that does not affect salient need-fulfillment efforts, or that is used or perceived benevolently for instrumental or normative reasons, may not affect or may even increase political trust (e.g., in South Korea; Liu and Liu, 2003).

Accuracy in (dis)trust is especially important for those low in power because their limited means imply that they may lack the surplus that would prevent a disaster from resulting should they misjudge where to invest their energies, time, and hopes. As such, trust in others is sensitive to vulnerability and uncertainty (e.g., Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt *et al.*, 1998). Vulnerability, or the degree of difficulty in meeting one’s needs, depends partly on one’s environment. One’s sense of vulnerability to others stems from the interaction between interdependence and three types of social risk: risk of noncooperation loss (overcautiousness), risk of standing inequality, or risk of betrayal (Hong and Bohnet, 2007). One who is dependent is more vulnerable if he or she could be excluded from cooperative arrangements, lives in an unequal environment, or could be betrayed. Dependency is one expression of power asymmetry; power

being fungible, those who are needy in one way may be more likely to be needy in many ways, and thus would be expected to be more dependent on others. Power asymmetry also introduces uncertainty, and in extreme cases asymmetry makes trust impossible (Farrell, 2004). Dependency and uncertainty can characterize interpersonal power asymmetry, but they are also nested in the group position in an intergroup power environment. Disadvantaged people *and* groups are more dependent, and thus more vulnerable. They are also more uncertain of the credibility of powerful agents' commitments. Both vulnerability and uncertainty thus make it less likely for disadvantaged people and groups to trust such agents, as we shall show.

Malevolent power asymmetries produce greater distrust among disadvantaged people in other ways. First, more powerful people have more opportunity to disempower others by excluding them from cooperative arrangements, by maintaining or increasing inequality or hierarchy, and by betrayal. Such actions are likely to be interpreted as hostile to the disadvantaged. Thus, disadvantaged people have both objective and subjective vulnerability. Second, the potential for the use of power asymmetry to empower or disempower others gives trust a moral character. Hence, trust is influenced by perceived beneficence or morality (Banerjee, Bowie, and Pavone, 2006). Research has shown that in asymmetrical relationships, low social status, a concomitant of low power and an effect of past disempowerment, makes attributions of benevolent intentions, and consequently trust, less likely (Lount and Pettit, 2011). However, this may not be the case in situations where the benevolence of authority is normatively assumed or expected (e.g., Liu and Liu, 2003). Third, in some political-cultural milieux, power distance can curtail familiarity, identification, and emotional linkage between trustor and trustee (Lewis and Weigert, 1985) – factors that inform trustors' perceptions of and expectations of the risk and uncertainty in trustees' motivations. Finally, trust is contingent on empowerment for both the advantaged and disadvantaged, but control over power is more internal for the advantaged. For the disadvantaged, trust is more contingent on the motivations, actions, and expectations of others and hence more uncertain. In multiple ways, then, without benevolent authorities, power asymmetry undermines trust in authority for the disadvantaged.

Political distrust

We now address trust in asymmetric power relations between the citizens and ruling political elites of managed democracies. Note that our definition of democracy is different from either the “shallow” definition as a

system of electoral selection of rulers (managers), or the “deep” definition, which is more often used in democratization literature, as electoral systems with certain levels of guaranteed freedoms or rights (e.g., Norris, 2011). In our view, the vast majority of contemporary governments are variants of managerial democratic systems. We consider them democratic because these governments are, to varying degrees, sensitive and responsive to citizens’ needs and demands, in whatever form those demands may be expressed (elections, protests, petitions, online activism, etc.). In this sense, democracy is not a form of government, but a gradient of sensitivity to popular influence and voice. In our view, constituents are able to exercise at least some influence in all but the most oppressive of countries (e.g., Saudi Arabia, an absolute monarchy, reformed its morality police, the *mutawwaa*, in response to public outcry). Modern governments are managerial as well as democratic. That is, in none of the internationally recognized states do the people actually participate directly in the legislation and execution of daily governance. Rather, they provide input on the selection or policies of the managers.

This specification of modern governments as managed democracies is important because it allows one to see that, under them, nonelite citizens have little alternative but implicitly or explicitly to accede some power, and authorities retain the ability to act in ways that are contrary to citizens’ interests. Self-interest therefore obliges citizens to evaluate authorities’ trustworthiness according to how well their political managers share their ideals and can and do enact them. As we will discuss later, there are many cases in which these managers fail to uphold this basis for trust. Simply trusting institutional constraints such as laws to induce authorities to provide desired treatment and outcomes may be insufficient (Pettit, 1998). Public-choice theory has made such points repeatedly and convincingly in the field of political economy (for an overview, see Buchanan, 2003).

We define political (dis)trust as constituents’ sense of how much governments serve to fulfill (or deny them) the needs those agencies are expected to enable. In other words, people’s political trust or distrust stems from perceptions of the degree to which political agencies will empower or disempower them. Given our conception of power as the joint consequence of people’s capacities and their environments, governments and political elites may disempower people by preventing them from accessing, developing, or using their own capacities or the capacities of the state, as by disrupting community-building or curtailing access to resources, security, or other necessities. Political trust is thus at least in part a function of the degree of power asymmetry between constituents and elites, and the historical trajectory of that power asymmetry. That

is, the amount of political trust constituents have depends on their past experience, present perception, and future expectation that governments reliably use their superior power competently and faithfully to empower their constituents, even when opportunity and incentive exist for authorities to do otherwise (see also Rai and Fiske, 2011).

Obviously, disadvantaged people and groups face greater power asymmetry *vis-à-vis* domestic and foreign governments than do privileged people or groups. In addition, insofar as disadvantaged people see their disadvantage as a failure of government or other dominant agents to empower them or as deliberate disempowerment, they are less likely to expect benevolent treatment, and may interpret it with suspicion if it does occur. This has been a factor, for example, in the failure of many development programs (Banerjee and Duflo, 2011).

We now explore how power dynamics can produce popular distrust in governments, especially among the disadvantaged. We assume, based on previous findings regarding the similarity of intra- and intergroup hierarchies, and their interlinkage, that the processes we describe will apply to both subordinate groups within states and to interstate relationships within the global hierarchy (e.g., Pratto, Sidanius, Bou Zeineddine *et al.*, 2013; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999).

In support of our theoretical reasoning, we present evidence that although inequality is increasing in some circumstances, the entire power hierarchy has shifted upwards, such that even many subordinated groups are sufficiently empowered, in absolute terms, to advocate a converging ideal of empowering participatory governance in ways they previously could not. We then assess how well governments meet this heightened popular standard. We conclude that the combination of the empowerment of the lower rungs of many states' social hierarchies and the normalization of the ideals of empowerment by government, and the overall failure of governments to meet this demand, produce a measure of distrust in authority, particularly among the disadvantaged. Disadvantaged people and groups, given their current and past experiences, may have very good reasons to distrust authority. It would be a mistake to pathologize distrust without taking such considerations into account. What the effects of this distrust are on democracy and social progress overall is a more difficult question than one might expect.

Putting people, government, and political distrust in context

Conditions for today's citizens differ from the past in several ways all over the world. First, economic conditions have improved for very many

people across the world. Since the 1970s and 1980s, \$2/day poverty rates have plummeted from 44% to 18% (Sala-i-Martin, 2002). Economies are much less agricultural on average, and occupational specialization is increasing (Inglehart, 1997). Females increasingly acquire paid labor, concomitant with attitudinal shifts towards gender equity the world over (Seguino, 2007). Second, primary and secondary education levels have risen and gender gaps are closing (Bloom, 2006). Higher education is also increasing, particularly in poor, developing countries experiencing economic growth (British Council, 2012). Third, communications are more open and available (Norris and Inglehart, 2009). Fourth, both interstate and intrastate violence has fallen substantially in the past 20 years (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2012). Fifth, over the past 40 years there has been a positive trend in the levels of political rights and in the number of countries electing their governments. For example, Freedom House (2012) reports that from 1989 to 2012, the percentage of countries that can be classified as electoral democracies has increased from 41% to 60%, and the percentage of countries categorized as “partly free” or “free” by their political rights and civil liberties index has risen from 54% to 76% since 1972.

This rosy picture does not apply equally to all countries or to all subgroups within countries, whether developed or developing. Within-nation wealth inequalities have remained stable or increased (Sala-i-Martin, 2002). Female economic empowerment and gender equity norms vary by region and country (Seguino, 2007). Education levels are stagnant or declining in a few regions, countries, and subgroups, and gender gaps remain larger in these locations than elsewhere (e.g., sub-Saharan Africa; Bloom, 2006). Cosmopolitan communications are not uniformly available across states or groups (Norris and Inglehart, 2009). Peace and liberties are likewise lacking in particular “hotspots” and for particular groups (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2012).

Nonetheless, in the majority of states, hierarchies have shifted *en bloc* upward – many of the world’s citizens are better off than they used to be. This has the most profound impacts on the most disempowered people and groups. For example, small differences in absolute levels of average wealth and economic development among the poorest states and people are associated with the strongest effects on the fulfillment of basic needs such as food, water, and health, as well as on overall quality of life, literacy, higher education, gender gaps in education, and subjective well-being (e.g., Diener and Diener, 1995). These effects are mediated by increased perception of freedom of choice, and supplemented by democratization and social liberalization (Inglehart, Foa, Peterson *et al.*, 2008). Civil and political rights gains have been driven by the tremendous strides taken

by historically disempowered groups within states, and internationally by states released from the bondage of colonialism or imperialism. Security gains have been largest among those states which suffered most from violence (e.g., sub-Saharan Africa; Institute for Economics and Peace, 2012). More open communications increase government transparency, providing to citizens, especially those distant from the centers of political power, the power of greater knowledge.

This empowering (partial) release from “survival mode” for many of the most disempowered brings their psychological reality closer to that of more powerful people (e.g., Magee and Galinsky, 2008). Their motivations and reference standards are converging on improving quality of life rather than avoiding existential insecurity (see also Inglehart, 1997), despite persistent inequality.¹ Indeed, conditions are increasingly ripe for intergroup relative deprivation (similar reference standards but unequal standards of living; e.g., for race: Major, 1994; for class: Brockmann, Delhey, Welzel *et al.*, 2008; for a review on relative deprivation, see Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, as the emancipative ideals of freedom and equality spread across and within states (e.g., Welzel, 2007), hierarchy-legitimizing ideologies and attitudes (such as the possibility that innate superiority or exceptionalism applies to certain groups) are undermined in the minds of the disempowered. If all humans deserve certain opportunities and freedoms *from government*, then the absence of these powers is no longer ideologically justifiable. This trifecta of (1) disadvantaged groups’ reference standards converging towards those of the privileged, (2) the continuation of wide discrepancies in whose needs are met, and (3) the replacement of dominant ideologies with emancipative ones (e.g., Inglehart and Welzel, 2005), is the perfect recipe for the delegitimization of agents, structures, and ideologies that perpetuate intergroup power hierarchies (Major, 1994).

Indeed, research suggests that increases in citizens’ perceptions and feelings of power, and of political systems’ potential openness, freedom, and changeability, may increase reactance (Laurin, Kay, and Fitzsimons, 2012), decrease system justification (Martorana, Galinsky, and Rao, 2005), and trigger system-change motivations and cognitive orientations (Johnson and Fujita, 2012). These effects are more likely to be

¹ This does not necessarily indicate that the disadvantaged have moved entirely from a prevention to a promotion self-regulation focus (Higgins, 1997), or from an avoidance to an approach orientation (Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson, 2003). Rather, it indicates sufficient empowerment to allow only a *partial* reorientation towards self-promotion/approach. Disadvantaged groups’ conditions are often transitional, and their orientations may reflect an increasingly even equilibrium between security/survival and broader emancipatory well-being concerns.

associated with distrust than with trust of political systems. In fact, according to the human development and empowerment models (e.g., Welzel and Inglehart, 2008), political cultures that prioritize emancipative values (i.e., people power or democratization, tolerance of nonconformists or social liberalization, and generalized trust in other people or social trust) are more likely to be critical (and express criticism) of governments and engage in transformative mass actions. Rising economic development has facilitated the increasingly critical, reformist orientations towards governments by empowering citizens' *capacity* for freedom of choice and social responsibility. According to these models, economic growth and other changes, such as higher education, more open communications, and increased social complexity, have also fostered emancipative and egalitarian values and excited citizens' *orientation* towards freedom and egalitarianism. Consequently, people are more frequently holding elites accountable, helping to further institutionalize governmental integrity and responsiveness to popular demands, and to promote *guarantees* of freedom and social responsibility. In other words, public empowerment increases the capacity for and attention to popular demands for more public empowerment and governmental responsiveness to such demands. When governments are laggard in providing, or actively thwart, this empowered aspiration for further empowerment, distrust of government may result and function as a goad and constraint to these governments.

Those who perceive emancipative values as individualist might assume that, in collectivist governmental systems relying on norms of the benevolence of authority rather than those of power dispersion and plurality (e.g., some East Asian systems), distrust may not play such a role (e.g., Liu and Liu, 2003). However, we would argue that the higher concern of governments in such systems to avoid criticism and maintain social harmony (Liu and Liu, 2003) makes even the *potential* for popular distrust of government a strong effect of and potentiator of popular empowerment. For example, in China, the state recognizes that the country's economic development is at a "critical" (\$1,000–3,000 GDP per capita) juncture, where people are beginning to move beyond basic survival concerns. And so the government has accepted (within somewhat narrow bounds, to be sure) the inevitability of popular discontent at this stage, while simultaneously initiating efforts to ensure that this discontent is not manifested in corrosion of the benevolent paternal image of the state, in distrust of and delegitimization (and destabilization) of the regime itself, through reforms aimed at those problems most likely to delegitimize and destabilize – inequality and corruption (e.g., Yang, 2006).

Our assertion that the various forms of popular empowerment can lead to increased criticism and distrust of government may be

counterintuitive. To understand this apparent irony, it helps to discuss the situation of people who are strongly versus only weakly subordinated. In the most oppressed and powerless communities, authorities can seem so powerful, so immutable, so awe-inspiring or terrifying, as to be almost superhuman in the images they project of themselves (e.g., Glassman, 1975; Merriam, 1938; Weber, 1947, pp. 358–60). The people in some of these oppressive environments may be given the right to select (or rubber-stamp) their rulers, but never to resist or disobey or often even criticize or escape them – for example, pre-seventeenth-century England (Burgess, 1992); pre-2011 Syria (Wedeen, 1999); contemporary North Korea). Regarding people's orientations towards these “divine,” “semidivine,” or sacrosanct rulers, we would assert that there could never be popular trust or distrust – only faith, terror, or irrelevance to the lives of the “peasantry” they rule. Political discontent then takes, or is given, the flavor not of functional distrust, but of dysfunctional apostasy. And that is precisely because in such exclusionary and oppressive systems, politics, authority, and the state are placed above and beyond the populace (Lewin, 1943), both symbolically and practically in terms of influence and responsibility, and normatively through establishment of faith- or terror-based legitimizing myths. One usually does not speak of trust or distrust in dealing with forces of nature or agents beyond control or reason.

In politics, as in other asymmetric social relationships, relationships of trust or even distrust (as opposed to a relationship of faith, obedience, adjustment, or fear) can only exist when participants mutually assume they have a reciprocally participatory relationship, where both trustor and trustee have responsibilities or obligations towards each other, and, more importantly, have at least some influence over each other (e.g., Farrell, 2004). This may also apply to perceptions of (in)justice and (il)legitimacy, which are closely linked to (dis)trust (e.g., Tyler, 2003). To speak of trust or system justification towards government in extremely oppressive or deprived conditions (e.g., Henry and Saul, 2006; Jost, Pelham, Sheldon *et al.*, 2003) misses the functional irrelevancy to the people of these attitudes in such circumstances. Trust in local communities or subgroups is a much more relevant and important factor, functionally and realistically, for people in these conditions (e.g., Scott, 1977). Further, interpreting oppressed people's trust or system justification as authentic overlooks the likelihood that expressions of trust or system justification under oppressive circumstances are unlikely to be a free, deliberate, and empowered choice in judgment, but rather a result of powerful propaganda, other forms of state manipulation or incapacitation of the people's ability to judge (e.g., censorship of cosmopolitan communications, isolationism, economic and educational deprivation, agenda-setting,

scapegoating), or a habitual survival technique due to the inherent danger in criticizing oppressive governments (e.g., Norris, 2011).

As oppression lessens, authentic (i.e., relatively free, deliberative, and functional) direct and indirect political expression and participation increase. Politics and state become a humanized inclusive value domain rather than the superhuman domain of times past (e.g., Lewin, 1943). The more a populace has the discretion as well as the resources to be included (or establish their inclusion) in the processes of political decision-making, and the more fundamental its role or influence in that process, (1) the more relevant and important it is to citizens to make accurate judgments as to whether to trust, justify, or legitimize the political system and the authorities that manage it, (2) the higher the bar they set for making these judgments (for a similar theoretical approach that makes this connection between power, rising expectations, and breakdown of government–constituent relations, see Chandra and Foster, 2005; Davies, 1979), (3) the freer they are to express these judgments, and (4) the more their political culture emphasizes making such judgments and acting on them. And it seems that as the world's publics find themselves more and more in this position, they are finding and expressing that they do not like what they see.

The conditions of disadvantage

Our theorizing posits that political trust hinges on how empowering or disempowering both the social ecology and the government within are, and whether they are (equally) so for all groups. We now focus on how well empowerment concerns are realized for disadvantaged states and groups, how this influences emancipative values, and how this affects political trust.

Many developing countries' economies have grown – several at astonishingly high rates – over the past decades. Consequently, these states' people increasingly emphasize democratization values (Welzel and Inglehart, 2008). Across the globe, nearly uniformly, people endorse democratization values, with very similar prioritization of civil liberties, free and fair elections, and more participatory approaches to the political process (e.g., legislation by referendum), regardless of world region or historical experience of democracy (Norris, 2011). In fact, the data show that there is now wider support for enacting laws by referendum among citizens in Africa and Eastern Europe than there is in North America, Scandinavia, or Western Europe (see Norris, 2011). However, substantial discrepancies between developing and developed states persist on economic and political empowerment; subsequently, people in the developing world still

show lower support of and consensus on the social trust and social liberalization dimensions of emancipative values (e.g., Norris, 2011; Welzel and Inglehart, 2008).

The economic and political empowerment experienced by many developing states emboldens subordinated groups to express populist emancipative values as well as collective grievances, but the insufficiency and inequity of this empowerment leads this expression to take the form of intergroup conflict (Schock, 1996). Violence and conflict restrict people's boundaries of trust to their kin and in-group members (i.e., decreasing social trust: White, Kenrick, Li *et al.*, 2012), and increase their authoritarianism (i.e., increasing emphasis on conformity; e.g., Duckitt and Fisher, 2003). Among more collectivist cultures (which tend at present to be situated in developing states or subordinated groups within developed states), threats to collective freedoms elicit more psychological reactance than do threats to individual freedoms (Jonas, Graupmann, Kayser *et al.*, 2009). When we put these findings together, it seems that political and economic empowerment may be facilitating the adoption and expression of populist emancipative values as well as collective emancipative and survival values, while the insufficiency or inequity of this empowerment may be hindering social trust and liberalization among disadvantaged groups.

Recall that our argument is that political distrust is often high because popular standards for governance, based in empowerment of emancipative values, have risen. Unfortunately, the empirical data to test this idea are not ideal, but some are consistent with the hypothesis. Uncritical respect for and deference to authority among citizens has been shown to be negatively related to some emancipative values (Inglehart, 1997; Welzel, 2007). Institutional trust is negatively related to freedom-associated Schwartz values, particularly self-direction, with both country-level socioeconomic and governance indices included in the model (Morselli, Spini, and Devos, 2012), and empowerment, emancipative values, and political distrust covary over time in the expected directions (Welzel and Inglehart, 2008).

Our theoretical analysis also implies there should be differences between privileged and disadvantaged groups within states on emancipative values and trust in government. Unfortunately, extant studies fail to test such associations. However, research shows that some individual and collective emancipative values, such as rejection of dominance and egalitarianism (Lee, Pratto, and Johnson, 2011), participatory politics (Norris, 2011), and social responsibility (e.g., Bobo, 1991), are higher among disadvantaged groups. Distrust of government also seems to be more prevalent among more disadvantaged groups (Catterberg and

Moreno, 2006; Hudson, 2006; Mishler and Rose, 2001; Norris, 2011). But the level of distrust of government among the people of different states and subgroups depends not only on political culture and the historical trajectory of government–constituent relationships but also on the extent to which governments are perceived to be empowering in the present, which has much to do with the shape of existing institutional structures and performance.

The failures of institutional structures and political elites

For all managed democracies, governments prioritize how institutional structures serve three functions: development, distribution (e.g., institutionalization of legislative and economic equality and procedural democracy), and policing (Neumann and Sending, 2010; Weiss, 1998). To consider whether institutional structures match their people's aspirations, it is instructive to compare clusters of governments that differ on these priorities. However, we acknowledge that states can vary in the ways and extent to which they adopt and apply these priorities, both between each other and over time (e.g., Walby, 2009). Thus, the following analysis makes inferences about archetypes rather than assuming that all states which can be classified in each cluster operate in the same ways or to the same extent as we describe.

Liberal states are more concerned with the politics of distribution than with the politics of development (Weiss, 1998). These states can be divided into two categories according to their ideological position on and procedural implementation of the politics of distribution: neoliberal, or uncoordinated “free-market” states (e.g., the USA), and social democratic states (e.g., Sweden; Walby, 2009).

In neoliberal states, market effectiveness is the primary principle guiding political policy and action. Such systems tend to be individualistic, competitive, and acquisitive. Given the prioritization of nonintervention over nondomination, neoliberal states enforce the “personalization” of trust or distrust more than in social democratic states, where vulnerability and uncertainty may be more attenuated due to wider institutional guarantees (Pettit, 1998). Several studies in wealthy neoliberal states have shown that economic individualism is fundamentally hegemonic and counter-democratic, denying social responsibility in government for all citizens; rising inequality and intergroup discrimination characterize these states (e.g., Walby, 2009). Furthermore, these states privilege exchange norms over reciprocity norms, potentially producing problems for reciprocal institutions such as social security or consumer-protection

bureaus (Braithwaite, 1998). For disadvantaged groups, the history of formal exchange that excluded them as reciprocal partners gives them few alternatives but to distrust (e.g., Molm, Whitham, and Melamed, 2012).

In neoliberal institutional environments, elites often value power, masculine domination, competitive success, and acquisition – for themselves as individuals and subgroups and for their states (Ruppert, 2000). The experimental games *Dictator* and *Ultimatum* provide an analogous situation, as these games' goals and rules (not necessarily in participants' choices) prioritize competitiveness and acquisitiveness. In environments emphasizing these priorities, research shows that the powerful tend to be proud, strategically motivated, less honest, economically egocentric, dominating, prejudiced, less concerned with social responsibility, and less empathic with others compared to the less powerful (e.g., Chancellor and Lyubomirsky, 2013; Handgraaf *et al.*, 2008; Hilbig and Zettler, 2009). When power holders are less constrained through the availability of plausible deniability mechanisms, they are even more likely to exhibit such tendencies (Dana, Weber, and Kuang, 2007). However, akin to social democracies, in experimental games with rules emphasizing reciprocity, power holders do not display many of these tendencies even when establishing plausible deniability is possible (van der Weele, Kulisa, Kosfeld *et al.*, 2010; see also Lammers and van Beest; Sassenberg, Ellemers, Scheepers, and Scholl; and Stamkou and Van Kleef, this volume, on political elites). A pair of studies have addressed the question of the interaction between power position and normative environment on sociopolitical attitudes more directly. De Oliveira, Guimond, and Dambrun (2012) showed that holding dominant power leads to justification and legitimization of inequality and the status quo primarily in hierarchy-enhancing (antegalitarian) normative environments, as opposed to in hierarchy-attenuating (egalitarian) normative environments. For example, the ideology of a government in power, as well as the structure of governance in a state, can influence the trust and well-being of disadvantaged groups directly through influence on governmental performance. Bjornskov (2008) finds evidence for this, showing that inequality decreases with growth when left-wing governments are in power, but increases with growth when right-wing governments are in power.

Our analysis implies that distrust of and dissatisfaction with governments should be greater in neoliberal than in social democratic states, given how vastly neoliberal states underrate their citizens' aspirations for economic redistribution and civil and political rights (e.g., Norton and Ariely, 2011; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). Differences between dominant

and subordinate groups on egalitarianism and social responsibility are widest in such individualistic, liberal, and wealthy states (Lee *et al.*, 2011). Trust in and satisfaction with developed neoliberal governments are lower overall than in social democratic states (Norris, 2011). Likewise, in the USA, subordinated groups distrust government more than dominant groups due in part to *higher* concern for equality and social responsibility among subordinates (Bobo, 1991; Hong and Bohnet, 2007).

Neoliberal forms of government have been at least partially adopted in much of the developing world (Agnew, 2009). The problems associated with developed neoliberal governments are exacerbated in many developing states by lingering existential levels of economic insecurity and conflict, as well as corruption, patronage, factionalization, and repression of citizen demands for democratization and egalitarianism (e.g., Khan, 2005). Such problems make the ordinary functioning of regimes more complicated, less efficient, more discriminatory, and, in the end, more disempowering for both state and citizenry, particularly for disadvantaged groups (Khan, 2005). Yet citizen demand for some dimensions of democratization and egalitarianism is high. The gap between such emancipative demands and their realization plants the seeds of political distrust. The grounds most fertile for these seeds are states that are not achieving growth or security – that is, those states failing to deliver on the existential survival needs and aspirations of their peoples as well as their emancipative needs and aspirations (e.g., Russia; Catterberg, and Moreno, 2006; Norris, 2011). Governments in those few developing states that do deliver on these existential aspirations, or that are strongly driven or constrained by norms of benevolence, social responsibility, and avoidance of shame, and are thus responsive to popular priorities and sentiment, can have remarkably high levels of satisfaction with and trust in political institutions – for example, Vietnam (Norris, 2011) and Taiwan (Liu and Liu, 2003).

Thus, for both developed and developing states, when citizens' aspirations are met by the structure, goals, and performance of the government, citizens may trust and be satisfied with government. However, the more inequalities reflect different unmet needs among subgroups, the more a government leaves aspirations unfulfilled for some groups. In neoliberal states or states adopting some neoliberal forms, the absence of vetting and adjustment of laws to provide compensatory protections respecting diversity and equality (Ruhl and Ruhl, 1997), and the presence of institutional discrimination (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999) produce inequalities in both outcomes and procedural fairness.

In contrast, social democracies address inequality and group diversity through extensive state intervention, with the guiding assumption that

the state is the ward of all the people, and governance must be socially responsible (e.g., Walby, 2009). Citizens in these states have among the highest emphases on emancipative and egalitarian aspirations for their governments (Norris, 2011). Reflecting the match between state structure and performance and citizens' political culture, social democratic states have some of the highest levels of trust (as confidence) in and satisfaction with government in the world (Norris, 2011). However, social democratic structures must be backed by large amounts of wealth and high stability in order to provide social safety nets and respect for diversity (e.g., Weiss, 1998). This may make them more vulnerable to economic (Weiss, 1998) and demographic and political-cultural shocks (e.g., Denmark; Rydgren, 2004), as well as prevent less wealthy or stable states from relying on this model to satisfy their citizens.

Overall, existing evidence shows that increased distrust of government results from stronger (empowered) political appetites for empowering, responsive governance, and the failure of governments to respond to this hunger. Disadvantaged groups' dissatisfaction with government is especially affected by the failure of government to enable their empowerment. Those dissatisfied with the way democracy works in their governments include supporters of losing political parties in electoral contests, people low on subjective well-being and life satisfaction, people with low incomes, and citizens of less economically developed, badly governed, and repressive states (Norris, 2011). To the extent that the past and the present inform disempowered people's expectations, they would not expect benevolent treatment or outcomes from government. Given that the disempowered are increasingly more educated, better informed, and more predisposed to be critical of authority, we should not be surprised that they would recognize, learn, and act from distrust of authorities who chronically make little effort to recognize and respond to their needs and aspirations.

Conclusions and future directions

Given that democracy requires some consent of the governed, distrust in government can cause alarm. This need not be the only response to distrust. Political distrust can improve democracy by making politics more participatory, and making governments more accountable and responsive to their people – *all* their people (Pettit, 1998; Welzel, 2007).

Despite this, political distrust among the disadvantaged, born of their rejection of inequality, their growing empowerment, and the normalization of openness (e.g., via increased political transparency and availability of information) also means that dominant groups face increasing

challenges to their hegemony, possibly leading to domestic social polarization (Bjornskov, 2007). Such tension and polarization can also be seen internationally, as dominant and liberal states are increasingly scrutinized and held accountable for their hypocritical support for conditions, statements, and actions that oppose the emancipative principles they purport to promote. Whether political distrust is a good thing for democracy depends on whether one considers the empowerment of the disadvantaged to be an essential goal of democracy, or whether putative participation suffices. Equally, the effects of political distrust depend on the extent to which governments and dominant groups contest this empowerment of the disadvantaged. The more disputed the road to egalitarian emancipation, the more likely it is for political cultures to regress from emancipative democratic ideals, and for dominance hierarchies to establish themselves all over again.

Despite the evidence for our thesis, our review uncovered areas that require further research. First, the literature should move beyond treating nation states as either monoliths or collections of individuals to address the conditions of within-state subgroups' political cultures, their orientations towards their governments, and the conflicts that may arise with increasing emancipation of the disadvantaged from the shackles of existential insecurity. While we found some evidence to support our theorized feedback loop between distrust and empowerment for both citizens of disadvantaged states and members of disadvantaged groups within states, more research is needed to confirm the correspondence of this relationship between the two levels, and to ascertain what differences, if any, exist in the relationship between these two levels.

Second, there is little empirical work on the influence of international governmental organizations and interstate relations (particularly international conflict and intervention) on distrust of domestic governments, despite the rich literature on their relation to the trajectories of development, popular political cultures, and government–constituent relations.

These two additional layers of complexity regarding development and political culture suggest that *collective* needs, aspirations, and emancipative values should be considered alongside values of individual emancipation, particularly notions such as social harmony and collective liberation. For example, perceived group victimhood can result from either hegemonic within-state or interstate histories and experiences of persecution or oppression. Rotella, Richeson, Chiao *et al.* (2013) show that such victimhood may have effects on whether popular trust resides in members of an exclusive in-group (e.g., conservative politicians) or in members of a superordinate group (e.g., national politicians).

Third, much of the work on trust and system justification fails to ground these judgments in a theory of all that trust and distrust do for

citizens in the context of neediness and disadvantage, as we have done here. Such a perspective would consider the balance of the material, relational, and psychological costs and benefits of perceptions or expressions of (dis)trust or (un)fairness among constrained peoples. Such conditions are rarely addressed through surveys of or experiments on first-world citizens.

Fourth, dominants may adopt insidious uses of even emancipative ideologies, through hypocrisy or plausible deniability (Aupers, 2012; Liu and Mills, 2006), to counter the empowerment of disadvantaged groups' political cultures (e.g., Jackman, 1994). More subtle consideration of ideologies, beyond their oppressive or emancipative nature, according to the ways in which they are used, is essential for theories of social and political development.

Finally, changes in the world prioritize research on the psychological and political consequences of political and social complexity. For example, from the perspective of constituents, what constitutes their social systems has become more masked (Giddens, 1991). Such ambiguity may lead to insecurities and self-doubt about what constitutes "reality" (Aupers, 2012). This may cause difficulties with political causal attributions and attributions about intentionality, capacity, and consistency, and the resultant uncertainty should increase distrust. Disadvantaged groups especially may adapt by exhibiting higher attributional complexity (Foels and Reid, 2010), which may attenuate the influence of individualist ideologies (Foels and Jassin, 2012) and ignite the collective self-perceptions and intergroup comparisons needed for them to perceive violations of entitlements (Major, 1994). Distrust may thus reduce social complexity by habituating action based on suspicion, monitoring, and demand for and activation of institutional safeguards (Lewis and Weigert, 1985). Research is needed to untangle the relationships between power dynamics in social environments, the various forms of social and psychological complexity, and political trust and satisfaction.

This chapter put forth a conceptual analysis of, and presented evidence for, the dynamics of asymmetries in political distrust. Citizens of developing states and subordinated citizens elsewhere increasingly emphasize emancipative and egalitarian values, but their governments often continue to fail to deliver these. A history of neglect, exclusion, hypocrisy, and contemporary vulnerability and uncertainty feed distrust. In our view, this is not symptomatic of any sort of pathological incapacitation (i.e., "paranoia") among the disadvantaged. Political distrust among the disadvantaged, like their noncompliance with and opposition to the agents or abettors of their oppression and disadvantage, can be a manifestation of an unprecedented thimbleful of power gained,

allowing them to move beyond the enforced day-to-day, to join the stream of history (Memmi, 1991) and become a greater part of that stream.

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8 All power to our great leader: political leadership under uncertainty

John J. Haller and Michael A. Hogg

National leaders are widely viewed as powerful players on the world stage. They play the chess game of diplomacy, trade, and war and are forever etched into history for their roles in world affairs. But national leaders are also extremely important to the citizens they represent, because they provide a sense of national identity and stand for the collective values and purpose of a country. During times of uncertainty, be it international or domestic conflict, economic instability, or change of national identity, leaders may be particularly important because it is in these contexts that they are expected to provide clear direction and to help resolve uncertainty. Indeed, leadership in times of uncertainty often shapes a leader's legacy. Leaders may lose their power or never come to power if there are any questions or doubts about their ability to weather such a storm. In times of great uncertainty, citizens often demand strong, directive leadership to manage the crisis and maintain the nation's sense of identity, strength, and international status.

Often, during uncertain times, citizens are willing to grant unprecedented autonomy and power to leaders in an attempt to manage crises. In contemporary US history, there are several examples of citizens tolerating, and even celebrating, seemingly extreme behavior by the leadership during times of uncertainty. For example, immediately following the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, the US Congress passed the Patriot Act, granting the government the power to monitor its citizens, an act that would have seemed unthinkable before the crisis occurred. During World War II, the US public supported the internment of thousands of US citizens of Japanese ancestry solely on the basis of their ethnicity. At the height of the Cold War, Senator Joseph McCarthy's anticommunist witch hunt was entertained by the highest levels of government.

Often these unprecedented submissions of power to authority are functional – that is, leader behavior effectively manages uncertain times and serves both leader and follower. When such power has temporary negative ramifications for followers, the power dynamics usually return to the previous, functional balance of power within the nation, with

concessions made to those harmed by leadership. In some cases, however, nations abdicate enormous amounts of power to leaders who are highly directive, autocratic, and authoritative. Many times, this results in leaders wielding complete and often destructive power over their nation. Some of the best-documented examples of this type of destructive leadership are the authoritarian governments of the twentieth century.

The history of modern social psychology is intractably linked with the analysis of authoritarian regimes of the twentieth century, particularly those regimes associated with World War II. Researchers have long sought to explain how masses of people are led to commit atrocities and support inhumane policies – the nasty outcomes of oppressive authoritarianism. Fewer scientific inquiries investigate how authoritarian power is established. What seems particularly problematic is that quite often nations are willing, if not eager, to hand over great power to political leaders who, in turn, use that power to oppress their citizens. Often these leaders use portrayals of conflict and threat to engineer perceptions of an uncertain world where they (and their party) can offer solace, protection, and purpose in an effort to galvanize support from the masses.

The mid-twentieth-century Soviet Union and Nazi Germany are well-known examples of popular governments turned authoritarian states. In 1917, Russian workers and peasants embraced the overthrow of the czar and the ensuing Soviet seizure of power. Using socialist ideology, Joseph Stalin capitalized on the country's economic hardships and created an isolationist Soviet Union. He then sold the crushing burden of his command economy to the Soviet people by exploiting a perceived threat from foreign countries.

Similarly, Adolf Hitler invoked German nationalism and antipathy to communists to gain absolute control of the Nazi party and Germany. He exploited the travails and uncertainty of the great depression of the 1930s, employing his National Socialist agenda to portray communists and Jews as the source of Germany's trouble, while insisting that nationalism, militarism, and absolute control by the Nazi party were the only way to defeat these threats.

There are many other examples of leaders using political and economic uncertainty to gain and maintain power: Benito Mussolini took advantage of his country's economic hardship that was fueling fears of a socialist revolution to establish his fascist state. Francisco Franco's military dictatorship was founded on extreme nationalism and a perceived impending threat of communism. After being installed by the Soviets, Kim Il-sung (and later Kim Jong-il) engaged in an endless campaign portraying the USA as an imminent imperialist threat to maintain popular support of the isolationist regime. In 1972, Ferdinand Marcos gained

dictatorial control over the Philippines by manufacturing threats from insurgent communists and Muslims. In the 1970s, Pol Pot created a polarized and demonized perception of a “decadent” West to support his creation of a national prototype and his ensuing extermination of prototypical deviants.

It is difficult to explain why a nation, or any group for that matter, should ever want to grant such unfettered power to one individual or a small leadership clique. Historically, research defines leadership as influence rather than the use of power (Chemers, 2001). Under authoritarian rule, however, group members abandon true leadership and embrace power-based rule. The goal of this chapter is to examine the social-psychological processes behind the transformation of leadership through influence into the abuse of power. We begin with a brief review of leadership theories from social psychology and organization science. We then draw on the social identity theory of influence, the social identity theory of leadership and uncertainty–identity theory to explain how uncertainty may motivate citizens to endorse leadership that is extremist and power-based rather than leadership that works towards the achievement of collective goals.

Leadership and influence

Leaders play an essential role in the existence and function of most groups by acting as a focal point for group identity, group goals, and collective action. Chemers (2001, p. 376) provides a practical definition of leadership as “a process of social influence through which an individual enlists and mobilizes the aid of others in the attainment of a collective goal.” Central to this conceptualization of leadership is the process of social influence whereby leaders influence followers to achieve the goals of the group. Although the words *power* and *influence* are often used interchangeably by laypeople, social and organizational psychologists distinguish power from leadership in that power gains compliance rather than true influence (Chemers, 2001; Cialdini and Trost, 1998; Lord, Brown, and Harvey, 2001; Moscovici, 1976; Raven, 1993). The influence of leadership is also distinct from mere conformity to group norms (e.g., Turner, 1991). With these distinctions in mind, we note that most research in leadership tends to examine leadership efficacy – how successful a leader is at achieving collective goals. This concept is independent of evaluations of leaders personally (e.g., liking, not liking), their goals, or their methods of attaining these goals (e.g., Kellerman, 2004).

The concept of effective leadership dates back to ancient Greece and, for centuries, focused on the traits of great leaders. Because leaders are a

focal point in group life, they tend to stand out from other group members, creating the perception that leadership characteristics are a result of personality rather than leadership context (cf. Gilbert and Malone, 1995; Haslam, Rothschild, and Ernst, 1998; Ross, 1977). While this perception may persist in the popular mind, the scientific proposition that leadership comes from innate personality attributes has waned in the last century. Recently, however, there has been a slight re-emergence of trait theories focusing on leader charisma (e.g., Avolio and Yammarino, 2003) and elements of the “Big Five” personality dimensions (Judge, Bono, Ilies *et al.*, 2002).

Modern leadership theories tend to take an interactionist approach in which leader efficacy hinges on how effective certain leadership characteristics are in different contexts. The 1960s saw the rise of contingency theories in which the effectiveness of particular leadership styles is contingent on properties of the leadership situation. In these theories, leadership styles vary in terms of leader orientation towards tasks or subordinate support (e.g., Fiedler, 1964; Hersey and Blanchard, 1969; House, 1971; House and Mitchell, 1974), or inclusion of subordinates in group decision-making (Vroom and Jago, 1988; Vroom and Yetton, 1973). Contingency theories are somewhat limited in that they focus on leadership style rather than social interaction between leader and followers; a limitation addressed by transactional theories.

Transactional leadership theories focus on elements of leader–follower interaction that are beneficial for one or both parties (Messick, 2005). An effective example of this exchange approach to leadership is Hollander’s study of idiosyncrasy credit (1958; Hollander and Julian, 1970). According to Hollander, followers grant leaders power and status credits to establish and maintain group order; in turn, leaders act in the most effective way to achieve followers’ goals. A key component of the leader–follower transaction model is conformity – that is, leaders who conform to group norms earn trust from their followers and idiosyncrasy credits. These credits are a resource that the leader may “cash in” in exchange for innovative behavior – that is, behavior that may violate group norms but move the collective in new directions (Hollander, 1958, 1985). This unique leadership ability to inspire group members to accept change that may be outside existing collective goals is a key concept in the study of transformational leadership.

Transformational leaders inspire group members to adopt a novel group vision that may be outside their own self-interest (Burns, 1978; Judge and Bono, 2000). Transformational leadership requires the consideration for followers’ needs that is present in transactional leadership. But, in addition, transformational leaders must also intellectually

stimulate followers by challenging their current mind-set and providing inspiring or charismatic leadership to motivate transformation (Avolio and Bass, 1987; Bass, 1985). Leader charisma is an essential element of the transformational leadership that is necessary to persuade followers to put aside self-interest in favor of working towards collective goals that serve to transform the group (Bass, 1990; Bass and Avolio, 1993). Although it harkens back to earlier personality theories (and their inherent problems), leader charisma is not necessarily a personality trait, but it may be attributed to the leader by followers based on their tendency to personify leadership (see Fiske and Depret, 1996; Meindl, Ehrlich, and Dukerich, 1985). An important consideration about charismatic leadership is that it may cut two ways (e.g., O'Connor, Mumford, Clifton *et al.*, 1995); charismatic leaders can be a transformative force for positive social change (e.g., Gandhi) or for societal destruction (e.g., Hitler) and, in less extreme cases, good and evil can be subjective.

The study of social cognition has influenced leadership research as well, resulting in theories such as leadership categorization theory (e.g., Lord, Brown, Harvey *et al.*, 2001; Lord, Foti, and DeVader, 1984; Lord, Foti, and Phillips, 1982; Lord and Hall, 2003; Lord and Maher, 1991). According to this perspective, people form schemas of how leaders should behave based on past experiences and preconceptions (see Fiske and Taylor, 1991). When people behave in ways that are in line with the leadership schema, they are mentally classified as a leader and are granted all other traits associated with that schema. In this way perceptions of leaders contain a “top-down” element whereby many of the beliefs about leaders are inferred from mental sets of traits.

While these perspectives on leadership have garnered empirical support, they have not really benefited from theoretical advancements in mainstream social psychology. In particular, modern leadership research tends to focus on the cognitive categorization of leaders and charismatic transformational leadership but ignores the role of group processes in leadership analysis. Recently, researchers have suggested that leadership cannot be thoroughly understood by focusing solely on leader behavior or categorization; instead, research and theory on leadership should focus on connections between the leader and group as well as the inter- and intragroup processes that influence power and leadership (Lord, Brown, and Harvey, 2001).

Social identity and leadership

The analysis of social acceptance of authoritarian power rests on an analysis of the conditions under which followers effectively conspire with their

leaders to permit and sustain power-based leadership. Leaders direct groups; thus, leadership is a group process where the interaction between the roles of leader and follower plays a fundamental part. A key insight into leadership as an identity-based group process is provided by the social identity theory of leadership (Hogg, 2001, 2003, 2012).

Social identity theory

Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes *et al.*, 1987) is an analysis of group behavior resting on the premise that people use group membership, rather than idiosyncratic traits, to define and evaluate themselves and others. According to social identity theory, people naturally group themselves and others into social categories that are cognitively represented as prototypes. Group prototypes embody a set of attributes (thoughts, attitudes, feelings, behaviors) that characterize similarities that are shared by group members yet distinguish the group from others. Effective prototypes follow the meta-contrast principle – that is, they minimize differences within the group while maximizing the differences between groups. This increases the perception of group entitativity – the idea that the social group has clear boundaries and is a distinct entity (Hamilton and Sherman, 1996). Because prototypes conform to the meta-contrast principle, they tend to define an ideal rather than a typical group member. They are also contextually dependent on the comparison group, such that the meta-contrast principle may dictate different or modified prototypes with different comparison groups.

When we perceive ourselves or others as belonging to a social group, we assign traits that are prototypical of the group to the individual. This gives us a sense of certainty because whether we know people individually or not, we can infer prototype-specific information about them. This process by which we view a person as a group member rather than a unique individual is called depersonalization. When people are depersonalized, they are evaluated by how well they fit the prototype which determines their level of group prototypicality. In this sense depersonalization is related to stereotyping, as all group members are perceived to embody some characteristics of the prototype.

Since our cognitive representation of the social world is structured around group memberships, we categorize not only others but also the self. Self-categorization theory (Turner *et al.*, 1987) clearly details the process by which we depersonalize the self and define elements of our self-concept from prototypes of groups to which we belong. When this social category is psychologically salient, we evaluate the self in terms of the group prototype and tend to view ourselves as more similar to

in-group members and different from out-group members, and tend to think, feel, and behave in a manner consistent with the prototype.

Categorization of the self and others satisfies two major motivations: self-enhancement and reduction of self-uncertainty. People are motivated to view the self in a positive light, including elements of the self that are derived from group membership; thus, individuals seek to achieve and sustain a positive in-group evaluation (e.g., Abrams and Hogg, 1988; Rubin and Hewstone, 1998). Often the motivation to self-categorize is much simpler – it occurs to reduce uncertainty about who one is, one's identity.

Uncertainty–identity theory

According to uncertainty–identity theory, individuals are highly motivated to reduce subjective self-uncertainty (Hogg, 2000, 2007, 2012). Feeling uncertain about the self, whether personally or interpersonally, or about one's place in society, is an aversive state which people are motivated to resolve. Identification with social groups provides a relief from subjective self-uncertainty through the depersonalization process whereby the self-concept is derived from a group prototype. Group identification reduces self-uncertainty because the prototype associated with a given social identity provides a guide to how individuals should think, feel, and behave in potentially ambiguous situations. Group prototypes provide a model of how individuals within the group and the group as a whole should behave as well as who members of other groups are and how they behave. In this sense they serve to inform people of how they should interact with members of their own and other groups. The tendency to identify with groups to reduce uncertainty is enhanced by the perceived entitativity of the social group (Hogg, Meehan, and Farquharson, 2010; Hogg, Sherman, Dierselhuis *et al.*, 2007). Entitative groups tend to have distinct boundaries and clear, prescriptive prototypes. Identification with these groups gives individuals an unambiguous concept of who they are and where they fit in the social world. Consequently, uncertainty motivates group members to identify with their in-group, and its defining values whatever they may be; this is particularly the case when a group is viewed as highly entitative. Both self-enhancement and uncertainty reduction provide motivation for individuals to engage in self-categorization and adhere to group prototypes.

There are frequent situations where uncertainty, particularly societal uncertainty, can be high. Economic instability is experienced by even the richest countries in today's highly interdependent global economy, and it impacts each citizen in turn. Food shortages and natural disaster leave

great masses of people wondering how they will feed, clothe, and shelter themselves and their loved ones. Societal inequality across the world promotes conflict between groups who consider themselves deprived and those who control resources. As these circumstances emerge, evolve, and shift, people look to leaders of important groups to provide answers. When uncertainty is extreme, people may seek groups that are highly entitative with simple prototypes and rigid hierarchy (Hogg, 2004). This may motivate people to seek leadership that is extreme, ideologically rigid, and authoritarian (Hogg, 2005a). In this sense managing uncertainty is a potentially powerful tool for authoritarian leaders because of its ability to motivate social-identification processes. To analyze this relationship further, the social identity theory of leadership provides a theoretical framework that helps to integrate social-identity processes, leadership, and uncertainty-identity theory.

Social identity theory of leadership

The social identity theory of leadership (Hogg, 2001, 2003, 2012) takes into account the premise that leadership is a feature of social groups and is subject to the social cognitive processes that influence group membership and group behavior. As outlined in the previous section, the processes of self-categorization and depersonalization play a central role in social-identity processes, group behavior, and intra/intergroup relations. Because leadership is a feature of group processes, it is highly plausible that social-cognitive processes have great influence on leader emergence, longevity, influence and effectiveness. The social identity theory of leadership aims to integrate the impact of leader categorization and charisma with important group processes that result from psychologically belonging to the group, particularly perceptions of group prototypicality.

One key tenet of the social identity theory of leadership that sets it apart from other more traditional theories is that, when group membership is important to people, leaders who are more prototypical are more effective regardless of personality or leadership schemas. Highly prototypical group members are embodiments of the group prototype; thus, they are more likely to be the source of influence and conformity processes while less prototypical members generally conform to these influence processes (e.g., Abrams and Hogg, 1990; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, and van Dijk, 2000). Prototypical group members are also more socially attractive and better liked than less prototypical members, allowing them to more easily gain compliance from the rest of the group (e.g., Berscheid and Reis, 1998). Prototypical leaders are also perceived as being central group members who identify strongly with the

group, leading other members to trust them to act in the group's best interest. This trust grants prototypical leaders a seemingly paradoxical advantage: By being prototypical they accumulate idiosyncrasy credits (Hollander, 1958) that allow them to act in more innovative, transformational ways, behavior that is at odds with the prescribed behavior of the group prototype. In other words, idiosyncrasy credits allow leaders to be nonprototypical and garner acceptance for novel ideas and group directions (e.g., Haslam and Platow, 2001a; Platow and van Knippenberg, 2001).

For prototypical leaders, trust is a powerful subsidy, particularly when the group faces uncertainty. Through categorization people are able to infer who they are, who others are, and the terms of interaction. A cohesive in-group has reduced risk of behavior that may threaten group members because individuals have a vested interest in the good of the group. Highly prototypical leaders are trusted greatly and this sense of trust is bolstered in the face of risk and uncertainty. One powerful way that group members respond to risk and uncertainty is increased group loyalty (Hirschmann, 1970). Often leaders manage trust by focusing the group's attention on threats from mistrusted enemies – for example, by characterizing Westerners as immoderate and immoral, and Muslims as dangerous and fanatical. Indeed, this has been a powerful tool for nearly all authoritarian leaders when consolidating and maintaining power.

Since prototypicality defines the standard of group life, members pay a great deal of attention to prototype-relevant information (e.g., Reicher, 1984). Thus the fact that a leader is prototypical makes him or her stand out against the background of the group, and this focus of cognitive activity enhances the correspondence bias – people disproportionately map others' attributes onto invariant underlying personality traits or dispositions (Gawronski, 2004). This attributional process produces the perception of a charismatic leadership personality (cf. Haslam and Platow, 2001a, 2001b). Prototypical and charismatic leaders' popularity and high status with the group leads them to be trusted to know what is best for the group and grants them the power to influence others (e.g., Erber and Fiske, 1984). Charismatic leaders play up their own prototypicality and dismiss personal behavior that may appear nonprototypical. They also direct attention to marginal group members who may be perceived as deviant or use comparisons with relevant out-groups in an effort to enhance their own prototypicality through a contrast effect. Another tactic is to vilify other contenders for leadership as being nonprototypical or even subversive. Authoritarian leaders use all of these strategies to help consolidate power, eliminate political challengers, and maintain control over a highly entitative group.

Uncertainty and power in authoritarian states

Often authoritarian leaders use discourse that creates a perception of uncertainty about the nation's safety, integrity, or future by exaggerating threats from other nations, people, or political parties. In line with uncertainty–identity theory, this process can raise group membership salience and drive national identification, further boosting the power of a prototypical leader (Hogg, 2005b; Hohman, Hogg, and Bligh, 2010). As is often the case in times of national change, the rise of authoritarian states occurs during periods of great social conflict. Whether it is war, poverty, conflicting social values, or simply a changing national identity, social conflict and disagreement are sources of intense uncertainty. People question their national identity, their values, and their future during these periods. It is during these times that the greatest number of people are experiencing the highest levels of uncertainty and desperately seeking answers. Authoritarian leadership is incredibly adept at capitalizing on this overwhelming need to reduce uncertainty.

Social conflict can threaten the distinctiveness of one's social group, driving members to seek enhanced group entitativity. Authoritarian leaders help to create a sense of strong entitativity that can lead the group to develop a mind-set of constant threat from foreign influence. Authoritarian leaders foster homogeneity and conformity by promoting uncertainty, suspicion, and intolerance while suppressing dissent, deviation, and criticism. They actively construct a rigid, indisputable worldview that distinguishes the superiority of the state while simultaneously portraying it as relentlessly threatened by outside forces. Authoritarian leaders also strengthen entitativity by defining the nation and its people in essentialist terms. Citizens view properties that define their national identification as a deep-seated and immutable essence that characterizes the nation and its citizens. Essentialism (e.g., Haslam *et al.*, 2000) creates the perception that group beliefs and attitudes are natural and right and have an important function to explain the group and its place in the world. In this sense, leaders who engineer and construct these entitative beliefs create a national ideology (e.g., Thompson, 1990) that is powerful and directive.

By using uncertainty to create a sense of enhanced entitativity, leaders foster a state where members are likely to derive a large part of their self-concept from their social identity as party members and to have a less distinct sense of a boundary between self and group (cf. Swann's notion of "identity fusion" – e.g., Swann, Polzer, Seyle *et al.*, 2004; Swann, Rentfrow, and Guinn, 2003). Through this transformational process, charismatic leaders can use extreme uncertainty to manipulate identification

and perceptions of entitativity and produce a radical state with orthodox and ideological belief systems. These nations develop an oppressive and suffocating environment that encourages orthodoxy and conformity, and stifles creativity and the introduction of new ideas. Initially, this degree of orthodoxy can be attractive to citizens; such a desire was captured when Milan Kundera wrote of life in Cold War-era, communist Czechoslovakia: "Authoritarianism is not only hell, but all the dream of paradise – the age-old dream of a world where everybody would live in harmony, united by a single common will and faith, without secrets from one another" (Kundera, 1979).

History suggests, however, that this dream is short-lived. These states become constricted environments where citizens live in fear of being exposed as a dissident or for not actively supporting the party. Creativity, innovation, and change by followers become exceedingly difficult, and leadership has relatively unlimited and unregulated power over citizens' lives. This too was captured by Kundera: "Once the dream of paradise starts to turn into reality, however, here and there people begin to crop up who stand in its way. And so the rulers of paradise must build a little gulag on the side of Eden. In the course of time this gulag grows ever bigger and more perfect, while the adjoining paradise gets even smaller and poorer" (Kundera, 1979). Often when these states succumb to such a stifling condition, citizens begin to lose faith in leadership, thus undermining leader influence. It is at this point that authoritarian leaders often rely on the threat of power to maintain control. It is this exorcism of power that lies at the crux of effective and destructive leadership.

Abuse of power is the destructive legacy of authoritarian leadership. Research in organizational science and social psychology defines effective leadership as a transformation of collective vision through influence, not through the coercive exercise of power (Chemers, 2001). Some researchers argue that influence itself is a form of power as it enables persuasion. Indeed, Turner (2005) included persuasion as the power to influence in his three-process theory of power. The power to persuade, however, is the ability to influence others' actions by convincing them the behavior is right, that they want to do it. While this is often the case in effective forms of leadership, what is often observed in authoritarian leadership is the other side of power: control. Control is the ability to gain compliance and influence actions that people do not want to take, or are uninterested in taking. Authoritarians gain compliance through two processes: authority and coercion. Leaders use their authority to control followers' behavior through group rules and norms. Citizens are compelled to obey the leader because the law demands it. Coercion is the use of threat to control citizens against their will. For example, the strict

police states of the Soviet and Nazi regimes were well known for using the threat of sanction, imprisonment, and death to control citizens.

While some leaders of extremely orthodox groups may not use their power in destructive ways, authoritarian political leaders often do. According to uncertainty–identity theory and the social identity theory of leadership, hierarchical role differentiation and the power afforded to prototypical leaders in highly entitative groups provide insight into leaders' harsh treatment of followers. Uncertainty influences leadership by motivating group identification, thereby enhancing prototype-based leadership. In conditions of high uncertainty, people not only identify more strongly with the group, but they also seek to enhance the entitativity of their group. Entitativity gives the group clear structure with well-defined role relationships; thus, leadership structures tend to be concrete with defined leader–follower role relations which reduce followers' uncertainty about their place in the world. High entitativity and prototype-based leadership are not inherently negative; they provide a guide for behavior and inform people of their standing in society. However, extreme uncertainty may transform leadership, as “a process of social influence through which an individual enlists and mobilizes the aid of others in the attainment of a collective goal” (Chemers, 2001, p. 376), into a form of autocratic, power-based tyranny (Hogg, 2001, 2005a, 2005c; Hogg and Reid, 2001).

When citizens identify with their nation as a highly entitative collective, the leader is invested with excessive power to influence. There are two essential reasons for this: trust and hierarchy role differentiation. Because prototypical leaders are trusted and liked by group members, they are given the opportunity to be creative and innovative. This affordance may lead them to stray from the best interests of the group. Citizens tend to approve of the leader's actions, or, if not, they believe that disapproval is nonnormative and are motivated not to voice dissent. In most groups, if a leader's behavior is too radical and violates the norms of the group, he will gradually begin to appear nonprototypical, thus losing his power to influence. However, when a group is highly cohesive and characterized by extreme ideological identification, consensual liking for the leader is so strong, and attribution to charisma so complete, that dissent and criticism are unlikely. In these situations, there are no checks or restraints on the leaders' ability to influence and they are able to make decisions with no entity in place to analyze their prudence or ethics. Social psychologists have been able to reproduce this effect in abstract laboratory settings, showing that group members are willing to endorse leaders who behave in ways that are not in the best interest of the group, as long as the leader is considered highly prototypical (e.g., Duck and Fielding, 2003).

The second reason that power becomes excessive in highly salient, highly entitative groups is that group structure is transformed into a starkly hierarchical role differentiation. Highly prototypical leaders who maintain a position of power appear exceedingly influential, consensually approved of, and essentially charismatic. This produces a status differentiation between leader and follower whereby the leader appears separate from the rest of the group and the leader–follower relationship becomes an intergroup relationship. The real-world consequence of this transformation is a genuine disconnect between the lives of leaders and citizens. Leaders are viewed as mythical “others” who wield vast power, defend against tyrannical national enemies, and have eyes and ears everywhere.

Leaders, however, can be incredibly out of touch with the lives of citizens. The intergroup context severs the empathic bond between leader and follower. Leaders and followers no longer share the same group membership. Instead, leaders inhabit a higher status that is perceived as consensual, stable, and legitimate. In this context there is significant potential for conflict between leaders and followers because power, as a commodity, is owned solely by the leadership. This situation is often naturalized and maintained by the development of powerful legitimizing myths (Chen and Tyler, 2001). Both leaders and followers can recognize a status-based group difference, the leadership inhabiting an all-powerful out-group position to the subservient in-group. Leaders may try to re-establish their in-group status and influence by confirming their in-group prototypicality; however, under authoritarian rule this is often not the case.

Authoritarian rulers preserve power (and status) differentiation, thus maintaining an intergroup relationship between leader(s) and followers. Paradoxically, this state of affairs diminishes the leader’s ability to influence based on prototypicality. This loss of influence can be perceived by the leader as a threat to his or her power and contribute to a sense of mistrust, rejection, and distance between the leader and followers. In turn, the experience of the leader as an out-group member further severs the empathic bond, motivating the leader to exercise power, rather than lead. In accordance with Turner’s (2005) three-process theory, leaders who lose their ability to persuade must inordinately rely on authority and coercion to exert their will.

In the absence of influence through persuasion, leaders who desire to control citizens must do so through either authority or coercion. If that leadership is still viewed as legitimate, leaders can impose their will through authority. Though the people may not be persuaded that the laws are in their best interest, they still see the ruling body as legitimate; thus, laws must be followed to maintain order and the integrity of the

group. It is important to note that deference to authority is not always experienced as oppression but is often viewed as voluntary submission which can empower followers (Tyler and Degoe, 1995).

If the leadership has lost the ability to influence and is not viewed as having legitimate authority, power may be exerted through coercion. In the most poisonous display of power, leaders use coercion with no effort to persuade or appeal to legitimate authority; instead they control followers' behavior against their will, usually through threat of sanction, imprisonment, or violence. Followers under the force of coercion have no conversion of personal belief or will; they are forced to behave according to the will of leadership under threat from the leadership itself. Coercion causes the dissolution of the empathic bond between leader and follower and any semblance of trust. It is important to note that Turner (2005) notes that this form of power is, in fact, the weakest process because it reflects a destruction of the functioning and unity of the group.

Conclusion

The history of human civilization is fraught with destructive leaders who abuse their power and the citizens who granted them that power. It is hopeful that so much attention is paid to these authoritarian rulers because humankind seeks to end what often turns out to be a very dangerous and destructive form of rule. In this chapter we use social-psychological research and theory to elucidate the rise and rule of destructive leadership.

An effective way to reduce subjective self-uncertainty, particularly that which is related to societal uncertainty, is to identify with subjectively important social groups. When people experience extreme societal upheaval and uncertainty, they are more likely to seek solace in highly entitative, ideologically rigid, and hierarchical groups. These groups foster authoritarian rule and are highly susceptible to abuse of power by leaders. Within these highly entitative groups, the prototype is typically simple, and leaders that closely resemble the prototype gain popularity and trust from followers. Along with social attractiveness and trust comes a great deal of power for these leaders as well.

In these authoritarian states, leaders may manipulate or even generate perceptions of uncertainty as a means of increasing and maintaining power. Uncertainty further drives members to identify and seek relief from the group and the leader. Uncertainty also enhances the perceived entitativity of the group, and, in concert with high member identification, grants the leader extreme power of influence. Authoritarian leaders use

their influence to build a state where they maintain complete control over resources, military power, and media. If leaders feel their influence slipping, they may abuse this power in an effort to maintain control over the populace.

However, authoritarian states that endure over time do so by more than brute force. The leaders of these states use control over their followers' lives to engineer a condition of uncertainty that perpetuates their rule. They employ propaganda to produce the perception of a state with an uncertain future that needs the guidance of the leader. They generate perceptions of attempted subversion from insiders who would harm the collective and threats from alien outsiders who would destroy their nation. Authoritarian leaders' absolute control of the flow of information in their states allows them substantial ability to use uncertainty to influence people. By creating "true believers," a leader does not need a constant threat of force to maintain control. It is notable, at the time of writing this chapter, that North Korea, one of the few remaining authoritarian states from the twentieth century, maintains absolute control over all media within the state and remains one of the most closed societies on earth.

Most leadership scenarios do not devolve into the abusive all-powerful state of affairs witnessed in autocracies. Contrary to earlier positions that leadership is entirely distinct from power, nearly all leaders exercise power, but in effective leader-follower relationships this occurs in the form of influence. In line with the social identity theory of leadership, the power to influence grows as a leader is more prototypical. This advantage does not automatically lend itself to abuse; ideally, more prototypical group members embody the will and goals of the group. Effective prototypical leaders are able to influence members in ways that help the group achieve its goals and maintain a positive identity. History, though, has clearly been marked by leaders that have twisted power to create a state that is abusive, stifling, and oppressive. Authoritarian leaders abuse prototypicality and manipulate uncertainty to galvanize their grip on power and then enact that power on citizens in oppressive and destructive ways. These states are characterized by a significant breach between leader and follower in terms of power and status – a power distance that breeds inter-group distrust and lack of empathy. This government structure creates an environment primed for the abuse of the meek by the strong. As noted by Turner, however, the use of abusive power is enacting the weakest form of power because it destroys the very foundation of the state. As such, authoritarian governments cannot stand forever by crushing their citizens; they change or they crumble.

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9 Those who supported and voted for Berlusconi: a social-psychological profile of the willing followers of a controversial political leader

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If Italians still vote for Berlusconi, they are the problem not him.

(Mario Monti, prime minister, February 20, 2013)

Introduction

Recently, the political arena has become more personalized, pointing out the importance of psychological variables beyond the traditional sociodemographical ones (Caprara and Zimbardo, 2004; Jost, Nosek, and Gosling, 2008). Voters are active, reasoning individuals that seek to achieve the best match between the political offer, on the one hand, and their personality, values and attitudes on the other hand (Jost, Federico, and Napier, 2009). The process of the personalization of politics involves two different aspects, one regarding the political candidates and the other concerning the electorate.

On the one hand, the focus of political campaigns is shifting more and more onto the candidate profile. In this sense, the personality of candidates is taking a key role in mass communications, the goal being to attract the attention and the support of voters. On the other hand, the psychological characteristics of voters, rather than their belonging to different groups, are becoming the pivotal variables in affecting political choices (Caprara and Zimbardo, 2004; Jost, 2006). Nowadays, beliefs, inclinations, personality traits, and values are becoming the most important factors that shape voters' choices in contemporary Western societies.

In Italy, a controversial and unusual political leader, Silvio Berlusconi, has typically embodied and promoted these processes in the last 20 years. But still, in modern democracies, voters are often skeptical and distrustful of political leaders, as political cynicism, negativism, and abstention seem indeed to be growing phenomena (e.g. Gnisci, Di Conza, Senese

et al., 2009; Pattyn, van Hiel, Dhont *et al.*, 2012). As regards Berlusconi, many legitimate reasons for suspicion and doubt have been raised both in Italy and abroad since he first entered politics. For example, throughout the last decade, such an international, authoritative review as *The Economist* has repeatedly referred to Berlusconi's character and his policies in negative terms, considering Berlusconi to be unfit to rule the country ("An Italian story," 2001), and as a political leader who has eventually fooled an entire country by prejudicing its future ("Silvio Berlusconi's record: the man who screwed an entire country," 2011).

However, although alternating wins and defeats have characterized his political career, Berlusconi has been able to overcome suspicions and worries, gaining a consistent and remarkable electoral consensus that allowed him to be a leading actor in Italian and international politics for almost two decades. How and why? Part of Berlusconi's political success evidently stems from his pervasive influence on the media, being himself a media mogul. However, this is only part of the story. Berlusconi's political success can be explained by looking at the ideological and psychological interface between himself and his electoral base. In fact, there is empirical evidence that people tend to vote for parties or coalitions that have leaders they perceive as similar to themselves and that pursue and promote policies they value as important (e.g., Caprara, Schwartz, Capanna *et al.*, 2006). In this perspective, many scholars agree that people feel attracted by ideologies (and politicians) that provide the best match with their own psychological motives, thereby creating a sort of "elective affinities" – that is, the strength of mutual attraction connecting the contents of belief systems and the motives of their adherents (Jost *et al.*, 2009).

Our main argument assumes that Berlusconi was able to achieve mass consensus because he has effectively managed to comprehend and appeal to the reasoning, beliefs, values, and character of the right-wing electorate (or at least a large part of it). Within this framework, it appears to be of primary importance to understand the psychological roots of Berlusconi's consensus by taking a closer look at those who supported and voted for him. Who are they? What do they think? How do they see the world? What is their personality? What do they pursue and what are their goals? Those were the research questions that guided our investigation. In this perspective, the aim of the present chapter was to draw a social-psychological profile of Berlusconi's followers by using original survey data gathered between 2007 and 2008. In the following sections, we will focus our analysis on the sociopolitical attitudes, personal values, and personality traits of individuals who voted for the right-wing coalition that supported Berlusconi as prime minister through a comparison with those who voted

for the opposing left-wing coalition. In the light of “ideology as motivated social cognition framework” (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski *et al.*, 2003), we argue that the key point in understanding Berlusconi’s success is the interplay between his psychological profile and his populist communication, on the one hand, and the psychosocial features of his electoral base on the other hand. While a lot has been written about Berlusconi (e.g., Caprara and Vecchione, 2006), less intensive analyses have been devoted to his supporters. Naturally, these psychological processes can explain only part of the entire complex phenomenon of achieving electoral consensus and practicing political power. Nevertheless, they apparently play an important, growing, and recognized role.

Social attitudes and political beliefs

In the last years, two kinds of sociopolitical attitudes have become important concepts in political psychology – namely, right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO). These constructs were found sufficient to account for a number of diverse phenomena regarding ideology orientation and intergroup relations. In fact, RWA and SDO have proven to be the best predictors of policy preferences, voting behavior, and prejudice (e.g., Altemeyer, 1998; Federico and Sidanius, 2002; Jost *et al.*, 2003; Leone, Desimoni, and Chirumbolo, 2012; McFarland, 1998; Peterson, Doty, and Winter, 1993; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999; Whitley, 1999).

RWA is currently defined by a configuration of three attitudinal clusters: conventionalism, submission to authority, and aggression against out-groups (Altemeyer, 1996). Individuals high in RWA tend to strictly adhere to rules, social norms, traditions, and conventions. They tend to endorse authority uncritically and are inclined to disregard or devalue norm-violators and disadvantaged out-groups. Conversely, SDO refers to individual orientation towards group inequality, and is framed within a theory of intergroup relations in which societies aim to minimize conflicts by creating ideologies that legitimize the hegemony of dominant groups and the oppression of out-groups (e.g., Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). Individuals high in SDO tend to prefer group relations to be hierarchical, whereas low scorers prefer equality between groups (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth *et al.*, 1994).

Although RWA and SDO were initially conceived as dimensions of personality, recent evidence suggests that RWA and SDO do not assess basic dispositional traits but instead social attitudes and beliefs that are broadly ideological in nature (Duckitt, 2001). In this perspective, some authors have suggested that RWA and SDO are rooted in different motivational

processes and socialization patterns. According to the dual process model of ideology and prejudice, RWA and SDO have different personality and attitudinal antecedents. RWA is mostly predicted by a belief that the world is a dangerous place to live in, which, in turn, is predicted by the personality dimension of social conformity (Duckitt, Wagner, du Plessis *et al.*, 2002). On the other hand, SDO is mainly predicted by the belief that the world is a competitive jungle, which, in turn, is predicted by the personality dimension of tough-mindedness (Duckitt *et al.*, 2002).

This conception of RWA and SDO is rooted in an enduring research tradition that has investigated the distinction between different dimensions of individuals' political attitudes and values (e.g., Braithwaite, 1994; Duckitt, 2001; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). Originally, Eysenck (1954) depicted a two-factor model of ideology, in which one component was represented by conservatism versus radicalism: this factor entails conformity, social order, and religiousness at one pole, and freedom, autonomy, relativism, and permissiveness at the other. This dimension closely resembles RWA. The other component was represented by tough-mindedness versus tender-mindedness: this factor involves power and inequality on one side and egalitarianism and concern for the underprivileged on the other. This factor strongly recalls SDO.

More recently, some authors have focused on the ideological dimensions of conservative agendas, identifying two basic components (e.g., Jost *et al.*, 2003): (1) acceptance of versus opposition to inequality, and (2) resistance versus openness to change. According to Jost *et al.*, these two dimensions reflect a fundamental psychological motivation – namely, avoiding threat and uncertainty. Acceptance of inequality would more closely translate into SDO, which focuses on competition and inequality in group status. On the other hand, resistance to change would more strongly translate into RWA, as it encompasses the conventionalism and authoritarian submission that make individuals high in RWA very committed to the conservation of the status quo. Similar reasoning is advanced by other authors who argue that economic and sociocultural conservatism exist as distinct strands (e.g., Feldman and Johnston, 2009; Zumbrennen and Gangl, 2008).

Within this framework, we aimed to investigate differences in social attitudes and political beliefs between Berlusconi's voters and the opposing left-wing voters. Our research questions were, what do they think and how do they see the world from a political point of view? In 2007, we administered a questionnaire containing measures of sociopolitical attitudes to 517 participants (252 men and 264 women, 1 missing value; the average age was 34.55 years – $SD = 10.50$), asking them to report how they had voted at the last national election of 2006. In that election,

two important political leaders were contending for political consensus. Berlusconi was the candidate for prime minister of a right-wing coalition called Casa delle Libertà (CdL – “Home of Freedom”), and Prodi was the candidate of a left-wing coalition called Unione (“Union”). In this sample, 209 participants said that they had voted for CdL, and 225 had voted for Unione (the remaining responses were missing, were those of nonvoters, or were those of participants that had voted for minor parties). Participants were interviewed via a structured questionnaire, including the scales of RWA (Funke, 2005) and SDO (Pratto *et al.*, 1994). Moreover, different aspects of political beliefs were also measured (Chirumbolo, Areni, and Sensales, 2004). These attitudinal dimensions were as follows: laissez-faire economics (i.e., free-market ideology), ethnocentric and anti-immigrant attitudes, preference for law and order, support for equalitarian and solidarist policies, multiculturalism, pacifism and antimilitaristic attitudes, nationalism, preference for an autocratic leadership and a centralized political power, individualism, and religiousness. Definitions and sample items of the constructs are given in Table 9.1

The results indicated that left-wing and right-wing voters significantly differed in RWA and SDO. Berlusconi’s voters were higher in both RWA and SDO than the left-wing voters of Unione (see Table 9.2). These results were also found when we controlled for demographics such as gender, age, and education.

Individuals that score higher in authoritarianism tend to adhere to social norms and conventions that are traditional and well accepted, and tend to obey uncritically and trustfully established authorities, institutions, and their representatives (e.g., the government, Catholic Church, Pope). At the same time, they disrespect and devalue deviant groups that are considered unconventional and norm-violators (e.g., homosexuals, immigrants, radicals, atheists, communists). In the same way, people that score higher in SDO reveal a preference for hierarchical intergroup relationships, desiring that their own in-group dominate the out-groups. They believe that society is reasonably divided into different social groups, and that some are superior to others by nature. They are motivated and feel it legitimate to perpetuate the distance between groups in terms of social and material status, and thus that inferior groups “should stay in their place” and be controlled by superior groups.

Moreover, the electorate significantly differed also regarding all political attitudes considered except for religiousness (see Figure 9.1). Controlling for gender, age, and education, multivariate and univariate analysis revealed that Berlusconi’s voters, compared with left-wing voters, showed more support for *free-market economy*, *ethnocentrism*, *law and order*, *nationalism*, *autocratic leadership*, and *individualism*; on the other

Table 9.1 *Definitions and examples of sociopolitical attitudes and beliefs*

Scale	Definition	Example
Right-wing authoritarianism	Conventionalism; authoritarian submission; authoritarian aggression	Obedience to and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn
Social dominance orientation	Preference for hierarchical (vs. equal) intergroup relationships; desire of one's own in-group to dominate the out-groups	Superior groups should dominate inferior groups
Laissez-faire	Support for free market economy vs. support for welfare state	The market always breeds richness The state should not intervene in the economy
Ethnocentrism	Attitudes against immigration policies and immigrants	Immigration increases criminality Illegal immigrants should be immediately expelled
Law and order	Demand for social order and discipline; respect for the law	We need more order and discipline for everybody
Equality and solidarity	Support for policies that favor equality among people and groups; solidarity	Giving equal opportunities to everybody increases social progress
Multiculturalism and universalism	Refer to a pluralistic, multicultural, and internationalist view of the world and of society	The state should encourage diversity and the freedom of cultural, philosophical, and political expression
Pacifism	Support for pacifist policies and antimilitaristic stands	If the government wants to conserve resources, we should cut military expenditure
Autocratic leadership and power	Preference for autocratic leadership and centralized political power	Only a strong leader can solve the problems of our country
Nationalism	Demand for strong national identity and feelings	We need to regain a strong national feeling
Individualism	Attitudes that set the individual's needs and interests before the community's; individual achievement as the most important thing	The individual comes before the community
Religiousness	Importance of religious and spiritual values	Religious education is very important for the individual

Table 9.2 *RWA and SDO scores as a function of voting*

	Unione (Left)	CdL (Berlusconi)
RWA	46.31	53.73
SDO	46.96	53.23

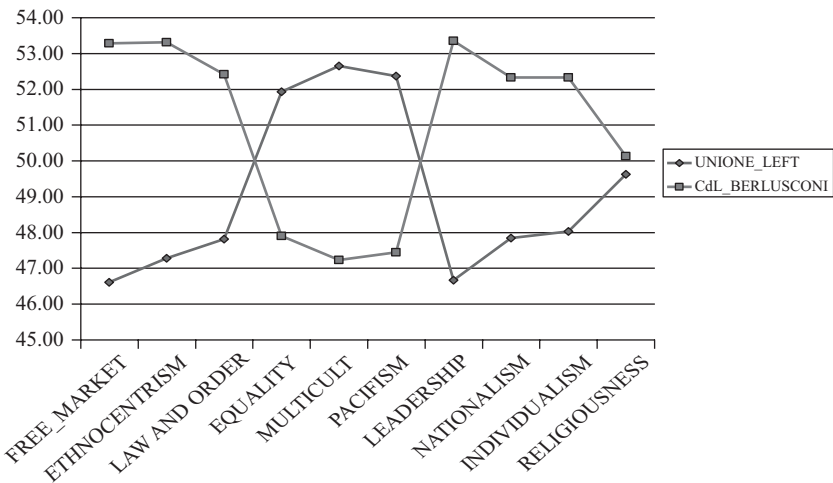


Figure 9.1 Political attitudes as a function of voting for Berlusconi versus the left-wing parties.

hand, they endorsed to a lesser extent *egalitarianism*, *multiculturalism*, and *pacifism*.

Berlusconi’s voters believed above all in economic laissez-faire and free-market ideology, as opposed to the welfare state and government intervention in the country’s economic structure. They favored policies that encompass individual freedom and light regulation. They favored private (vs. public) entrepreneurship and supported the noninterference of the state in business and the economy. Conversely, they opposed polices that tend to increase the redistributive function of the welfare state, to support the disadvantaged strata of society, and to reduce the discrepancies between social groups and integrate different cultures and communities. These kinds of political beliefs appear to be consistent with their higher level of SDO.

Right-wing (vs. left-wing) voters believe that a strong, autocratic leader can solve the problems of the nation by imposing his decisiveness and determination over the ineffective power of parliament and political

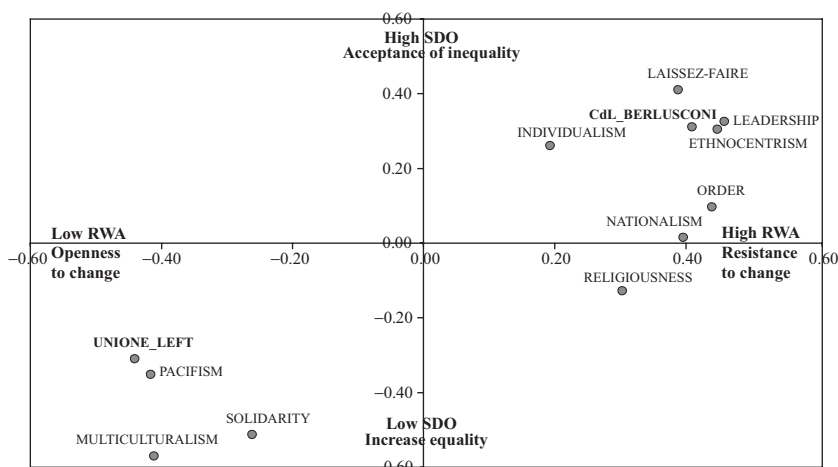


Figure 9.2 Plot of the political attitudes as a function of RWA and SDO.

parties. This centralization of power would make political decisions faster and more efficient, ensuring respect for the law, and discipline and order in society. Moreover, this kind of political belief appears to be in line with their higher level of authoritarianism.

We then considered the two basic dimensions of social attitudes (RWA and SDO) together with political beliefs. We conceived RWA as indexing the factor of “cultural conservatism/resistance-to-change” versus “cultural liberalism/openness, and SDO as indexing the factor of “economic conservatism/acceptance-of-group-inequality” versus “economic liberalism/increase-group-equality.” In Figure 9.2, we plot the political attitudes and the two groups of voters (left-wing and right-wing) in this bidimensional space.

Figure 9.2 clearly shows how voting and the different sociopolitical beliefs group together. The votes for Berlusconi cluster together with beliefs such as *economic laissez-faire*, *individualism*, *autocratic leadership*, and *ethnocentrism* in the quadrant of high RWA/resistance-to-change and high SDO/acceptance-of-group-inequality. On the other hand, votes for the left-wing side go together with *multiculturalism*, *solidarity*, and *pacifism* in the quadrant of low RWA/resistance to change and low SDO/acceptance-of-group-inequality. Political beliefs such as *nationalism* and *law and order* gravitate mainly on the high RWA/resistance-to-change pole, as they do not appear to imply an endorsement of inequality per se.¹

¹ Interestingly, religiousness did not seem to load in any of the two dimensions. This result can be explained by the presence of Catholic parties and voters in both left-wing and right-wing coalitions.

Taken together, these results indicate a very clear picture of the sociopolitical beliefs of Berlusconi's supporters and how they see the world. Many of these ideological stands have characterized the entire political career of Berlusconi and his charismatic populist leadership, matching well those held by his electorate.

Since he entered politics in 1994, Berlusconi has appealed to his electorate by promising a "*rivoluzione liberale*" (literally, "laissez-faire revolution") with slogans such as "*meno stato, meno tasse*" (i.e., "less state, less tax"). Even in the last election campaign of 2013, the *key* promise he made was that he would cut, or even abolish, property tax on houses (known in Italian by its initials as IMU). He has always promised voters that he would pursue laissez-faire politics by reducing the power of the state in society and by cutting public expenditure (e.g., on public education and the healthcare system).

Presenting himself as the champion of laissez-faire economics in a populist fashion, Berlusconi guaranteed that he would provide the strong and autocratic leadership necessary to support that cause. This aspect of his profile is also consistent with another important political stand of his electorate: belief in the need for a powerful leader able to solve the problems of the country. Berlusconi was often portrayed to the electorate as being more innovative, dynamic, dominant, and energetic than Prodi, the leader of the left-wing coalition (Caprara and Vecchione, 2006). From the point of view of his electorate, decision-making in parliamentary democracy is slow and ineffective, and a centralized political leadership is seen as much more desirable. Berlusconi has often expressed his intention to centralize power and politics in his hands, often framed as at the expense of parliament and political parties. This kind of leadership, however, was often demanded by Berlusconi's supporters themselves, in order to ensure social stability and respect for the law, in contrast, in their opinion, to the deviant groups that cause criminality (such as immigrants) or that are the enemy of personal freedom (such as communists and political extremists).

Certainly, the anticommunist claims of Berlusconi's rhetoric are shared by his supporters and appear to play a crucial role in understanding his political success. In fact, Berlusconi has always framed his political discourse by referring to two distinct, opposing, and irreconcilable sides between which the people are urged to choose (e.g., Berlusconi, 2001; Bolasco, Giuliano, and Galli de Paratesi, 2006).² In doing this, he

² For example, in a very famous speech delivered in Milan in 2000, Berlusconi declared, "The choice that you must make is the choice between two Italies, between two different conceptions of humanity, of society, of the state: the choice between the Italy of taxes

emphasized the distinction between “us” and “them.” “Them” (the enemy) is the entire left wing, described as a homogeneous out-group, completely identified with the communists and the extremists. This opposing side is always presented as evoking evil consequences (e.g., insecurity, unemployment, taxes, hate, the end of individual freedom). In this way Berlusconi has effectively managed to attract and persuade the ideologically anticommunist, right-wing electorate.

Last but not least, voters for Berlusconi’s right-wing coalition scored higher on ethnocentrism, as they were against immigration policies and had anti-immigrant attitudes. This is not surprising, though, as higher scores on RWA and SDO were consistently associated with prejudice (e.g., Altemeyer, 1996; Duckitt *et al.*, 2002). Anti-immigration rhetoric was not indeed crucial in Berlusconi’s ideology; he has often adopted a functionalist approach to the question. That is, in Berlusconi’s view, immigrants are welcome if they can help the Italian economy by their work, provided that they are guests in the country with permission to stay (Berlusconi, 2001). However, anti-immigration policies were pivotal for two important parties in Berlusconi’s coalition – namely, Lega Nord (“Northern League”) and Alleanza Nazionale (“National Alliance” – merged in 2008 with Forza Italia into Popolo della Libertà (“People of Freedom”)).

Values

Political messages, beliefs, and ideologies are often constructed around a set of key symbols and values that are both cognitively and emotively salient. Values are deemed to reflect the needs and wishes of individuals and groups, and can be defined as broad goals to which people attribute importance as guiding principles in their lives (e.g., Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). Values are consistent and relatively stable across a variety of situations, circumstances, and domains. They shape attitudes and behaviors, and for this reason are considered to provide the underlying basis (often implicit) of individuals’ decisions and attitudes. With respect to ideologies and beliefs, values are theoretically placed at a more abstract level.

A recent comprehensive and established theoretical framework is the motivational theory of basic human values of Schwartz (1992, 2005). This author distinguishes ten motivational types of values: *universalism*,

that are unjust and too many, of insecurity, of fear, and of unemployment; between the Italy that only knows how to forbid, to condemn, and to hate, and another Italy, our Italy, that knows how to love. This is the Italy that I have in mind” (Berlusconi, 2001).

Table 9.3 *Values and their underlying motivational goals according to Schwartz (1992)*

Values and motivational goals	Examples
<i>Power</i> : social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources	Likes to be in charge and tell others what to do
<i>Achievement</i> : personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards	Being very successful
<i>Hedonism</i> : pleasure and sensual gratification for oneself	Wants to enjoy life
<i>Stimulation</i> : excitement, novelty, and challenge in life	Looks for adventures and likes to take risks
<i>Self-direction</i> : independent thought and action – choosing, creating, exploring	Thinks it is important to be interested in things
<i>Universalism</i> : understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection of the welfare of all people and of nature	Wants everyone to be treated justly
<i>Benevolence</i> : preservation, and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact	Very important to care for the people one knows and likes
<i>Tradition</i> : respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide the self	Wants to follow customs and traditions
<i>Conformity</i> : restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms	Thinks people should follow rules at all times
<i>Security</i> : safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of the self	Important to live in secure surroundings

benevolence, tradition, conformity, security, power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, and self-direction (see Table 9.3 for definitions). They are organized along a two-dimensional, circumplex structure. These two orthogonal dimensions are “openness to change versus conservatism” and “self-transcendence versus self-enhancement.”

Barnea and Schwartz (1998) found that, excluding religious parties, values such as tradition, conformity, and security characterize a conservative orientation, while self-direction, hedonism, and stimulation are more related to a liberal orientation. Similarly, in an Italian sample, right-wing (vs. left-wing) voters were found to be higher in security, power, achievement, conformity, and tradition, and lower in universalism, benevolence, and self-direction (Caprara *et al.*, 2006). Values are also related to social attitudes such as RWA and SDO, whose motivational bases emerged as

being partially different from each other (Cohrs, Moschner, Maes *et al.*, 2005). RWA related more strongly than SDO to conservation values as an expression of the motivational goals of social control and security. Conversely, RWA and SDO related equally to self-enhancement versus self-transcendence values.

In this theoretical perspective, we aimed to investigate the motivational underpinnings of Berlusconi's supporters: our research questions were, what do they pursue and what are their guiding principles? Therefore, the Portrait Value Survey that assesses the ten values of the Schwartz model (Schwartz, Melech, Lehmann *et al.*, 2001) was administered to 1,188 participants (587 men; 598 women; 3 participants were excluded for failing to report their gender; mean age = 34.5 years). The survey was conducted in 2007, and participants were asked to report which coalition they had voted for at the last national election held in 2006. In this sample, 559 reported that they had voted for a party of the right-wing coalition that supported Berlusconi (Casa delle Libertà – CdL), and 630 for a party of the left-wing coalition that supported Prodi (Unione). Multivariate and univariate analysis showed that those who voted for the Berlusconi coalition (CdL) were significantly higher than the left-wing voters in the values of *stimulation*, *achievement*, *power*, and *security*. On the other hand, Berlusconi's voters were significantly lower than left-wingers in the values of *benevolence* and *universalism*. These results were found while controlling for demographics such as gender, age, and education.

We can say that the individuals who voted for the CdL coalition have as their primary motivation the realization of personal success, aiming at social status and prestige, to be obtained mainly through control or dominance over people and resources. Similarly, they tend to give very much importance to tradition, stability, and respect for social norms. They appear very committed to the customs and ideas of traditional culture or religion, and very concerned about the safety and the stability of their society. They severely condemn deviants and violators of expectations or norms. On the other hand, they appear to be less interested in and less guided by principles that stress understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection of all people and nature.

These are exactly some of the values that Berlusconi personally embodies. In fact, a very common representation of Berlusconi is that of a self-made man who, from relatively modest origins, could reach an important position in society, both socially and financially, and who has even achieved political power and international prestige. He has stood as a symbol and example for many people. Moreover, in his political

speeches, he has always stressed traditional and religious values, and national strength and order (Bolasco *et al.*, 2006).³

In fact, Berlusconi's political oratory often appeals to the values of *conservation* (i.e., tradition, conformity, and security), he himself personifying the *self-enhancement* values (i.e., power and achievement). In this way he has been able to achieve a reasonable match between himself, his political discourse, and the values of his electorate, and has built a correspondence between his ideological stands and the motivating standards and guiding principles of his supporters. Moreover, by reserving for himself the values of tradition and security and ascribing to his opponents the burdens of uncertainty, division, poverty, hate, and the like, Berlusconi has usually also appealed to the epistemic motives of the right-wing electorate – namely, the need for security and avoidance of uncertainty (e.g., Jost *et al.*, 2003). The fact that, over the long term, Berlusconi has not kept his political promises and, above all, that his public image has fallen short of the traditional values he has claimed to advocate, could reasonably explain his eventual partial political decline.

It is worth noting that the values and attitudes of Berlusconi's supporters are common among conservative supporters in Western societies. What appears peculiar is the match between Berlusconi's charismatic, dominant, dynamic, strong, and tenacious personality (Caprara and Vecchione, 2006) and his skill in interpreting and giving voice to the attitudes and actions of those Italians who have constituted a great part of his electoral base. In fact, Berlusconi has shown an indubitable talent in building a match between his political communication and populist claims and the expectations and the psychological needs of his followers. Other successful conservative figures of the past (such as Margaret Thatcher or Ronald Reagan) surely showed a clear mastery of subtle communication skills. Nonetheless, Berlusconi appears to have gone beyond the style and qualities of the "Great Communicator," making it possible for his electoral base to identify with a character that might have been perceived as aloof because of his great wealth, media power, and previous

³ For example, in a very famous public speech delivered in Rome on December 2, 2006, Berlusconi claimed, "[W]e don't like a mentality that devalues the family founded upon marriage and upon love between a man and a woman, upon the training of the children to freedom and responsibility . . . [W]e propose a society based on the values of Christianity, on the natural family founded upon marriage made by the union of a man and a woman, in which children are born and grow up. We propose an Italy that will be strong and respected all around the world. We propose a homeland that everybody identifies with and that everybody loves . . . Instead, the left-wing is preparing for Italy a future of uncertainty, of divisions, of social envy, of poverty. The Left is carrying out policies that destroy the family and do not respect the moral values of the Italian people, the values of our tradition" (quoted in Bolasco *et al.*, 2006).

political connections starting in the late 1970s. Berlusconi did not appeal only to the supposed tendency of his electorate to show a submissive – but respectfully distant – devotion to their charismatic leader. He instead managed to make his character available as a model of identification for his supporters.

Personality

Personality can be defined as a self-regulatory system that is shaped dynamically by personal adaptations during the individual life span (Caprara and Cervone, 2000). This internal system is deemed to control processes of the affective, cognitive, and motivational spheres, guiding people towards the achievement of individual and collective goals. Moreover, personality provides coherence and continuity in behavioral patterns across different settings, and generates and preserves a sense of personal identity (Bandura, 2001; Cervone and Pervin, 2009).

Admittedly, personality does play a role in shaping ideological beliefs and attitudes (Jost *et al.*, 2003). In this vein, personality traits proved to be important predictors of ideology and voting, and most of the recent research has been devoted to the relationship between the “Big Five” traits and political orientation. The openness factor appeared to be the most powerful predictor across the studies, left-wingers (or liberals) consistently scoring higher than right-wingers (or conservatives) in several different countries (Caprara *et al.*, 1999; Jost *et al.*, 2003; McCrae, 1996; Shoen and Shumann, 2007; van Hiel and Mervielde, 2004). Conscientiousness scores are generally higher among conservatives (vs. liberals), whereas higher agreeableness is usually found among liberals (vs. conservatives) (Caprara *et al.*, 1999; Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swann, 2003). Recent meta-analysis showed that RWA is mostly predicted by lower openness and higher conscientiousness, whereas SDO is mainly predicted by lower agreeableness (Sibley and Duckitt, 2008).

Less agreement can be found in the literature regarding the other personality traits. Shoen and Shumann (2007) reported a positive association between neuroticism and liberals; this, however, was not found in previous research (e.g., Caprara *et al.*, 2006; Gosling *et al.*, 2003). Extroversion turned out to be rarely correlated to political orientation; nevertheless, energy and dominance (extroversion components) were consistently associated with right-wing orientation in many studies (see Caprara and Zimbardo, 2004).

With the growing interest in the moral and interpersonal dimension of politics (Graham, Haidt, and Nosek, 2009; van Lange, Bekkers, Chirumbolo *et al.*, 2012), recent studies have investigated the

Table 9.4 *The HEXACO personality traits (Ashton et al., 2006; Lee and Ashton, 2004)*

Personality traits	Definition	Descriptors
Honesty–humility	Defined by characteristics such as honesty, fairness, sincerity, modesty, and lack of greed	Sincere, loyal, generous, altruistic, honest, <i>egoistic, hypocritical, lying, presumptuous, haughty</i>
Emotionality	Defined by characteristics such as anxiety, fearfulness, sentimentality, dependence, and emotional reactivity vs. <i>self-assurance, toughness, and bravery</i>	Emotional, vulnerable, anxious, fragile, fearful, <i>secure, decisive, strong, courageous, independent</i>
Extroversion	Defined by characteristics such as talkativeness, sociability, and cheerfulness vs. <i>shyness, passivity, and quietness</i>	Extroverted, exuberant, expansive, open, vivacious, <i>reserved, shy, silent, introverted, closed</i>
Agreeableness	Defined by characteristics such as good-naturedness, tolerance, and agreeableness vs. <i>temperamentalness, irritability, argumentativeness, and criticalness</i>	Peaceful, calm, mild, patient, tranquil, <i>irritable, choleric, aggressive, litigious, irascible</i>
Conscientiousness	Defined by characteristics such as organization, hard work, carefulness, perfectionism, and thoroughness	Precise, orderly, diligent, methodical, conscientious, <i>untidy, inconstant, imprecise, careless, rash</i>
Openness	Defined by characteristics such as imagination, originality, creativity, unconventionality, rebelliousness, and inquisitiveness	Progressive, eclectic, innovative, ironic, original, <i>devout, traditionalist, puritan, servile, religious</i>

Note. The counter-trait descriptors are indicated in italics.

relationship between personality traits and ideological orientation within the HEXACO model of personality (Ashton and Lee, 2007; Lee and Ashton, 2012). The HEXACO model of personality (Honesty–humility, Emotionality, Extroversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness) emerged from cross-cultural research on the personality lexicon conducted in different countries (Ashton, Lee, Perugini *et al.*, 2004; see Table 9.4 for a description of HEXACO traits).

Extroversion, conscientiousness, and openness strongly recall the Big Five traits. These factors are believed to represent different degrees of engagement in three areas of functioning: social (i.e., extroversion), task

(i.e., conscientiousness), and idea-related (i.e., openness to experience). The other three factors of HEXACO differ somewhat in their structure and meaning with respect to the corresponding Big Five traits. In addition, the honesty–humility trait cannot by any means be interpreted as a rotational variant of the Big Five and indeed represents the real uniqueness of the model.

The general trait of honesty–humility assesses the inclination not to exploit other individuals even when there is no risk of negative consequence for such exploitation (Ashton and Lee, 2007). It refers to dimensions of *sincerity* (i.e., tendency to be genuine in interpersonal relations), *fairness* (i.e., tendency to avoid fraud and corruption), *greed avoidance* (i.e., tendency to be uninterested in possessing wealth, luxury goods, and signs of high social status), and *modesty* (i.e., tendency to be modest and unassuming) (Lee and Ashton, 2004). In general, individuals high in honesty–humility tend to describe themselves as sincere, loyal, generous, altruistic, honest, faithful, helpful, undeceptive, and so on. On the other hand, individuals low in honesty–humility tend to depict themselves as egoistic, hypocritical, lying, presumptuous, haughty, deceitful, devious, greedy, crafty, cunning, pretentious, and so on (see Ashton, Lee, de Vries *et al.*, 2006).

Recent studies have pointed out that the honesty–humility factor turned out to be positively associated with left-wing orientation (Chirumbolo and Leone, 2010; Zettler and Hilbig, 2010). Moreover, honesty–humility proved to be the second best personality predictor of voting (after openness), and the HEXACO factors as a whole surpassed the Big Five ones in predicting voting and ideology (Chirumbolo and Leone, 2010). SDO appeared to be negatively predicted by lower honesty–humility, while RWA was mainly predicted by lower openness (Lee, Ashton, Ogunfowora *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, the relationships between personality traits and social attitudes appeared to be mediated by social worldviews (Leone *et al.*, 2012).

Within this theoretical framework, we aimed to investigate the personality profile of Berlusconi's voters by mean of the HEXACO traits and its facets. Our research questions were, who are they and how do they describe themselves? For this purpose, the HEXACO-PI-R was administered to 279 participants (140 men, 139 women, average age = 37.77 years) shortly after the national election of 2008. This instrument comprises 192 items that measure the six personality factors in the model (see Lee and Ashton, 2004; Table 9.4 for description).

In the election of 2008, two main parties competed. On the right-wing side was the Popolo della Libertà (PdL; literally, "People of Freedom"), Berlusconi's new party that emerged from the merger of the two

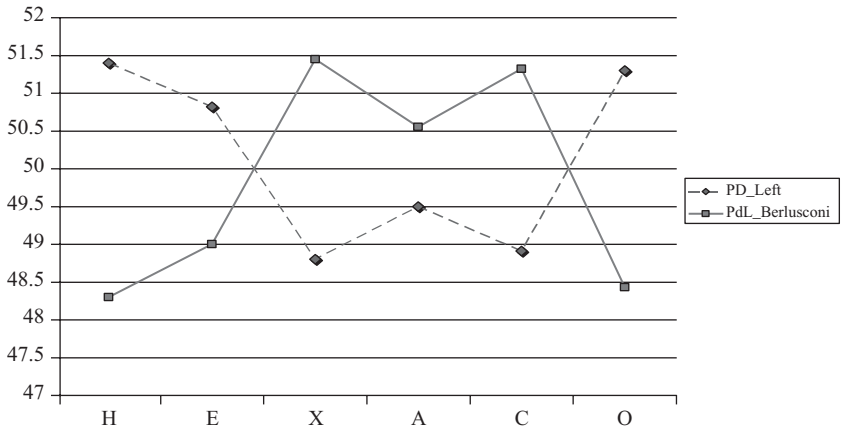


Figure 9.3 Personality profiles of the voters according to the HEXACO traits. H: honesty-humility; E: emotionality; X: extroversion; A: agreeableness; C: conscientiousness; O: openness.

most important parties of the right – namely, Forza Italia and Alleanza Nazionale. On the left-wing side was the Partito Democratico (PD) (“Democratic Party”).⁴ These two parties conducted a protracted, and sometimes ruthless, electoral campaign that opposed the principles of the social democratic left-wing side to the principles of the Berlusconi right-wing side. In our sample, 126 participants reported voting for PdL and 153 for PD.

With respect to the general HEXACO traits, the voters of these two opposing parties showed significant differences (see Figure 9.3). When we controlled for gender, age, and education, the supporters of Berlusconi’s PdL turned out to be higher in extroversion and conscientiousness than supporters of the PD, and lower in honesty-humility and openness. Contrary to expectations and the findings of previous studies, the supporters of the left and the right did not differ in agreeableness.

How did the supporters of Berlusconi describe themselves as compared to the supporters of the left-wing party? They scored higher on extroversion. Usually, such individuals feel positively about themselves, experiencing feelings of energy; they feel confident when they are in the position of leading other individuals or groups, and they like social meetings and interactions. Berlusconi’s voters scored higher in conscientiousness,

⁴ This party was formed in 2008 and stemmed from the merger of the Democratici di Sinistra (the left-wing party) and the Catholic party called Margherita.

as characteristic of very organized and reliable persons. Typically, these people work very hard and discipline themselves to achieve their goals; they make a lot of effort for accuracy and perfection in their tasks, and tend to organize their time and their environment precisely. They scored lower on openness, which is known to be the best personality predictor of political orientation across culture. Persons with low scores on openness are not very interested in diverse forms of art, have less intellectual curiosity, feel little attraction to creative hobbies and activities, and tend to stay away from ideas, philosophies, and movements that may look radical or unconventional. Last but not least, supporters of Berlusconi's party scored lower in honesty-humility. Lower scores on this scale are indicative of persons that recall the trait of Machiavellianism: they are probably disposed to flatter others to get what they want from them. Breaking rules for personal profit is not a problem for low scorers in honesty-humility. They are primarily motivated by material gain and feel a strong sense of self-importance.

As for the value systems, it is apparent that these differences in traits between voters are in harmony with the lively, active, enterprising, status-oriented spirit of the Italian right wing, well represented by its leader Berlusconi, as opposed to the pluralistic, tolerant, and solidarity- and culture-oriented character of the Italian left wing. Some voters' traits appear also to match well the character of Berlusconi himself and his public image of being hard working, socially overconfident, and audacious – anything but modest and unassuming – and inclined to violate rules and norms by exploiting antagonists in order to gain personal benefits and advantages.

Rise and decline but no surrender

Since his great electoral success in 2008 (PdL won 37.4% of the votes), Berlusconi has faced a period of difficulty and decline. In autumn 2010, a schism within his party began to cause great difficulty for his political majority in the parliament. From that moment, Berlusconi started to lose, gradually but inexorably, his political consensus, both in the parliament and among his electorate. In May 2011, the right-wing coalition suffered a major defeat in the local elections. The electoral verdict in the city of Milan was emblematic. It directly concerned Berlusconi since he had personally run in the election as a candidate. In the end, his vote fell by 46.8% from that obtained in the previous city election of 2006 (votes for him fell from 52,577 to 27,972). Under the strain of economic crisis and international pressures, Berlusconi decided to resign

Table 9.5 *Electoral performance of Berlusconi's parties in the national elections since 1994*

Elections	Party	Percentage of votes	Number of votes
1994	Forza Italia (FI)	21.0	8,136,135
1996	Forza Italia (FI)	20.6	7,712,149
2001	Forza Italia (FI)	29.4	10,921,335
2006	Forza Italia (FI)	23.7	9,045,384
2008	Popolo della Libertà (PdL)	37.4	13,628,865
2013	Popolo della Libertà (PdL)	22.3	6,829,135

as prime minister in December 2011 since he was no longer able to ensure a political majority within the parliament.

Surprisingly, in December 2012, Berlusconi decided to run also in the national elections of 2013 as the major candidate of the PdL. Shortly after this announcement, Berlusconi's party, which opinion polls had predicted would receive 15% of the votes, started to regain some of the consensus it had lost, and in this last election, his party got an unexpected 22.3% of the votes. That means, however, that its share of the vote had decreased by 15.1% (falling from 37.4% in the 2008 election to 22.3%) and the number of its votes had fallen from 13,628,865 to 7,332,121. In 2013, after he had been almost 20 years in the political arena, Berlusconi's electoral consensus was at its minimum in absolute terms of votes (see [Table 9.5](#)).

Nevertheless, despite this clear electoral defeat, Berlusconi was not perceived as being overthrown. Nowadays he still appears to be far from being out of the political scene. This is, firstly, because this result was by far better than all the analysts had expected before the election; and, secondly, because of the relatively poor performance of the center-left party (PD),⁵ – and partly also because of the unexpected electoral success of the new party, the “Five Star Movement.” In an audacious electoral campaign, Berlusconi managed to bring his party back from near oblivion by restyling himself as an antiestablishment and antiausterity populist, and by promising to refund the homeownership tax, even offering to use his personal fortune to do so (cf. “Italy chooses none of the above,” 2013).

⁵ The PD obtained an absolute majority of the parliamentary seats only in the lower house (the House of Deputies), but not in the Senate.

Why have people continued to support Berlusconi over the years?

One of the most intriguing questions, often asked by international political commentators, is why Berlusconi has enjoyed such a long political career and such electoral success despite his disregard of electoral promises, his prosecution by justice officers, and gossip about his immoral conduct. For many years, the scandals and the trials involving Berlusconi did not appreciably affect his popularity among the right-wing electorate. Only at the very end was this support noticeably reduced. However it has not completely faded yet, as the last national elections held in 2013 showed. This is a puzzling phenomenon for many international analysts who “have a hard time understanding why a media mogul who led Italy to the brink of bankruptcy in 2011, who is accused of tax fraud, Mafia associations, exploiting underage prostitutes and misconduct in public office, still manages to compete head to head in national elections” (Giumelli and Maneschi, 2013). Paradoxically, Berlusconi’s strategic position on the conservative side is possibly even stronger, in view of the failure of conservative alternatives, and the weakening of its long-time ally, the Northern League.

The reasons for this phenomenon are certainly many and very complex indeed. One speculation is that Berlusconi’s personal wealth, as one of the richest men in Italy, and his mass-media holdings (e.g., television stations, daily newspapers, magazines) have given him, since the 1980s, great influence and power in almost all aspects of Italian economic and political life. Hence, Berlusconi could persistently pursue and achieve his political and personal goals over the years, and remain on the wave crest despite the fact that he was politically defeated more than once. However, this alone is not sufficient to fully understand and account for Berlusconi’s success. The most crucial factor may be, instead, his ability to match his political communication and populist claims to the expectations and psychological needs of his followers.

One of the main reasons why many people have supported Berlusconi is mostly ideological in nature. As we noted, the largest part of his electorate hold typically right-wing beliefs and values and would never support or vote for the left-wing party, which they consider “the enemy” and “the evil.” Besides that, a large number of people and certain social strata have, of course, directly benefited from his political victories. Since 1994, in fact, Berlusconi has nurtured a broad constituency among businessmen, shopkeepers, the liberal professions, and entrepreneurs who have benefited from lax government regulations, remission of taxes, and the like.

Berlusconi is perceived as the only true representative of the traditional values of the right. Historically, moreover, Italian voters have always been attracted by the strong man, the charismatic leader, who can straightforwardly solve the country's problems (Giumelli and Maneschi, 2013). The example of fascism and Mussolini is in that regard very self-evident. We noted that Berlusconi's supporters fervently long for an autocratic and powerful leader. The psychological underpinnings of this standpoint can be found in their higher authoritarianism (e.g., social conformity and obedience to authority), lower openness, and higher need for security. At the same time, Berlusconi's supporters are driven by standards of self-enhancement, power, achievement, and status seeking, whose psychological bases can be traced to their lower humility and higher SDO. In this regard, they do not appear very different from right-wing voters in other countries. However, as noted before, Berlusconi has shown himself able to perfectly provide and fulfill these psychological instances in a populist and effective fashion, as no other political leader has apparently had the gift to do. Opponents and analysts that have often stigmatized Berlusconi's inclination to break the rules of democracy did not take into account that his electorate was entirely behind this behavior. If anything, the fact that Berlusconi was finally unable to exert this sort of autocratic leadership can, to a certain extent, explain his loss of consensus among his electorate in the final months of his last government.

Berlusconi always depicted the rise and coming to power of the "communist" left as fatal and disastrous – a real threat to freedom and to all Italian society. He has continually claimed to be the only leader able to prevent this. This harping on the "communist threat" has characterized Berlusconi's political discourse in the last twenty years. This theme was pivotal even in the last electoral campaign, and he has constantly aimed to arouse feelings of fear, uncertainty, and insecurity among his electorate by warning of a future of unemployment, poverty, high taxes, lack of individual freedom, social disruption, and threat to the traditional way of life. It is well known that these perceptions of uncertainty, fear, and insecurity are epistemic motivations connected to conservative ideology (see, e.g., Jost *et al.*, 2003). When such situations that evoke threat and fear are primed, they may cause a real shift of the electorate towards right-wing political beliefs (Nail and McGregor, 2009), even among those that define themselves as "liberals" (Nail, McGregor, Drinkwater *et al.*, 2009).

In this respect, Berlusconi's voters (vs. left-wing voters) usually have lower epistemic motivations, scoring higher on the need for closure and authoritarianism (Chirumbolo, 2002; Chirumbolo and Leone, 2008) and lower on openness (Caprara *et al.*, 1999; Chirumbolo and

Leone, 2010). Thus they appear to be particularly receptive to all these invocations of threat. From a psychological point of view, this means that, in summary, they tend to conform more to conventional ideas and behaviors; to uncritically trust authority and leaders; to blame and devalue out-groups; to prefer simplicity to complexity; to desire stability, order, and predictability; to be less motivated to analyze information deeply; and to prefer the known and the established to the unknown and the radical. Accordingly, at least in part, these might also be the “psychological” reasons why the largest part of the right-wing electorate keeps supporting Berlusconi despite the fact that, in most cases, his promises are never kept, and his ideological claims never translate into real life. Even though his arguments and communication strategy have lost part of their efficacy over the years, Berlusconi has shown that he can rely on “hard-core” supporters who will always vote for him, no matter what he does. These hard-core followers represent one-fifth of the eligible voters at the minimum, and they appear to be fascinated by the charismatic figure of a leader who is reassuring and promises progress and prosperity for all, finding this “strong man” attractive even when he cuts corners in the democratic process. The attractiveness of this “strong man” figure is not only determined by submissive authoritarians but also composed to some extent of a genuine identification with the leader. In this sense, the lack of a charismatic, authoritative challenger is another reason for Berlusconi’s enduring success (Giumelli and Maneschi, 2013). Actually, it is evident that, in recent years, no other Italian political leader of either the right or the left has been able to attract mass consensus for such a long time as has Berlusconi.

Finally, Berlusconi’s trials and scandals appeared to have eroded, but not completely eclipsed, his popularity. How could this be? An explanation may be provided by one of the most important personality predictors of political voting – namely, honesty–humility (see also Chirumbolo and Leone, 2010). As a political candidate, Berlusconi is often rated as having more leadership and innovativeness but less integrity and reliability than, for instance, his competitor, Prodi. This would indicate that voters are sufficiently aware that Berlusconi is not a champion of integrity. Considering that Berlusconi’s supporters typically score lower on the honesty–humility factor, we could also speculate that possibly the moral sphere is not the primary dimension on which the right-wing electorate are apt to evaluate Berlusconi and his suitability as a candidate, other dimensions being more important. Therefore, to some extent, scandals and trials have not decreased his popularity too much. Many Italians clearly do not like him because of his unethical and often immoral conduct. However, many people are still sympathetic to him, or simply do

not care, so that this disapproval has not fatally damaged him in political terms. Why? Individuals with lower scores for honesty–humility tend to be lower in sincerity, fairness, and modesty, and see increased opportunities for personal gain from the exploitation of others. Moreover, low-honesty–humility individuals are also higher in Machiavellianism, and that means higher in manipulateness, mendaciousness, and callousness (Lee and Ashton, 2005). Violating rules is perceived as legitimate if necessary to pursue one’s own goals. Probably, Berlusconi’s followers strongly identify with their successful leader, considering him simply “smarter” than other people. They would possibly act in the same way if they were in his place – a matter of “elective affinity.”

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10 A growing confidence gap in politics? Data versus discourse

Rudy B. Andeweg

By almost any measure, public confidence and trust in, and support for, politicians, political parties, and political institutions has eroded over the past generation. (Dalton, 2004, p. 191)

I use the word “erosion” deliberately. This word seems to best express the phenomenon of mistrust in advanced democracies. The words disillusion, disenchantment, malaise, used by some authors, seem insufficient to describe it. On the contrary, the words crisis, delegitimization and pathology, used by some observers, seem excessive.

(Dogan, 2005, p. 12)

The most interesting phenomenon, however, is the strength and tenacity of the policy discourse on a decline in citizens’ trust in the public sector. The indicators do not show a decline in public trust in the public sector, yet it is quite generally believed by policy-makers there is such a decline. (van de Walle, van Roosbroek, and Bouckaert, 2008, pp. 61–2)

[P]ublic support for the political system has not eroded consistently in established democracies, not across a wide range of countries around the world. The “crisis” myth, while fashionable, exaggerates the extent of political disaffection and too often falls into the dangers of fact-free hyperbole. (Norris, 2011, p. 241)

A growing gap between citizens and politicians?

The long-term expansion of government responsibilities has not kept pace with governments’ capacity to perform, and the resulting “overload” is fueling citizens’ disaffection with an ineffective public sector. The post-war education boom has turned gullible and deferential

I am indebted to the European Commission for access to the results of the Eurobarometer surveys 1 (spring 1974) to 77 (spring 2012), and to the European Social Survey and the Norwegian Social Science Data Services for access to the data of ESS Rounds 1 (2002, edition 6.3), 2 (2004, edition 3.3), 3 (2006, edition 3.4), 4 (2008, edition 4.1), and 5 (2010, edition 3.0). I thank Jacques Thomassen, Joop van Holsteyn, and the editors of this volume for their comments and suggestions.

subjects into politically sophisticated and critical citizens, who easily see through politicians' empty promises. The end of the Cold War has deprived us of a deterrent alternative, finally allowing us to focus on the shortcomings of our own political authorities. The alleged causes and their timing may vary, but it is hard to find a democratic country where political pundits and politicians have not commented recently on "a legitimacy crisis," "a *Politikverdrossenheit*," "a democratic malaise," or "a widening confidence gap."

This confidence gap between citizens and politics surfaces at least as regularly in political commentaries as the elusive Loch Ness Monster used to in other sections of the newspapers. To a certain extent the gap is more real than the monster. It is an inevitable side effect of any representative democracy. Etymologically, "representation" means 'representation,' a making present of something absent – but not making it literally present. It must be made present indirectly, through an intermediary; it must be present in some sense, while nevertheless remaining literally absent" (Pitkin, 1969, p. 16). This ambiguity creates a tension between the principal and the agent and, in that sense, representation presupposes a gap. Ever since Edmund Burke and John Stuart Mill, political philosophers have debated the appropriate distance between citizens and their representatives. In addition, representative politics is competitive: elections produce winners and losers, and voters on the losing side obviously have less confidence in the new government than those who voted for the winners – a point to which I shall return. The issue, therefore, is not whether a confidence gap exists, but whether the gap has been widening in recent decades.

Only a small number of empirical studies claim that this is indeed the case. Mair (2006) presents time-series data in support of his claim that "citizens are heading for the exits of the national political arena" (p. 44): declining party membership, declining turnout at elections, and increasing ticket-splitting (i.e., voting for different parties when elections for different offices are held at the same time) and volatility (i.e., voting for different parties in consecutive elections) in Western Europe. The trends, especially since the 1980s, are not in dispute, although the drops in turnout in national elections are still modest, and although there are exceptions (such as party membership rates in relatively young democracies). The interpretation of these trends as symptoms of citizen disillusionment, however, is questionable. Inferring motives from behavior is never straightforward, and here alternative explanations seem to be more plausible.

Political parties, for example, are not the only organizations losing members: trade unions, churches, service clubs, etc., are all suffering the

same fate. There is a general trend of individualization affecting political and nonpolitical organizations indiscriminately. With regard to declining voter turnout, often cited as a symptom of the confidence gap, it appears that the group of hard-core nonvoters, who never vote, is quite small. We find many more occasional nonvoters, and the reasons that they themselves offer for their abstention vary greatly, from nonpolitical reasons (forgot; lost voter registration card; had illness; was abroad) to political reasons (wasted vote, i.e., the party of preference stands no chance in the voter's electoral district; lack of importance of election, etc.). What seems to emerge is that modern (individualized and better-educated) voters are making a deliberate decision to participate or to abstain on the basis of what is at stake and what is on offer. Elections for the European Parliament, for example, are widely perceived as "second-order elections," which do not decide the composition of any government, and in which there are no great differences between the parties. As a consequence, turnout in European elections is considerably lower than turnout in national elections, although at that level sizeable fluctuations can be observed, depending on the closeness and perceived importance of the election. It is even less clear why increasing volatility and ticket-splitting point to disengagement of citizens. Mair argues that "inconsistency goes hand in hand with indifference" (2006, p. 38), but in many countries the ideological and sociological differences between political parties are fading, making it increasingly hard for voters to make a choice – and at the same time making it easier to make a different choice in different elections. In addition, the decline of voter loyalty can be seen as yet another consequence of individualization, in which voters are freed of their sub-cultural shackles (of social class or church) and start to make their own choices, with or without the assistance of voter aid applications.

Others look at attitudes rather than behavior. Dogan (2005) speaks of an "erosion of confidence in thirty European countries," but he offers only cross-sectional, not longitudinal, data (from the third wave of the European Values Study, 1999–2000) as "evidence" of a decline of confidence in political institutions, political parties, and politicians. The strongest case for a long-term erosion of public support for politics is presented by Dalton (2004; also see Putnam, Pharr, and Dalton, 2000). Survey questions in the American National Election Study on whether the government can be trusted to make the right decisions, whether officials care about ordinary people, and whether government actions benefit all, all show a downward trend since 1958. No data points are available before 1958, but, if we assume that 1958 represents not a peak but the edge of a plateau, there is an unmistakable secular decline until the late 1970s, after which the figures show trendless fluctuation. Unfortunately,

such a long time-series of truly comparable survey data is exceptional, and for other countries than the USA we only have sporadic evidence pre-dating the 1970s. In most countries, reliable time-series start only in the late 1960s and early 1970s and show ups and downs but no consistent trend, as do the American data for that period. It is to that period, roughly speaking 1970 to 2010, that comparative studies of political trust must confine themselves.

Distinguishing democratic regime, institutions, and political actors

So far, I have left the conceptualization rather vague. One of the problems with a concept such as the “confidence gap” is that people can interpret it in very different ways and still agree that it exists and is growing. Such different interpretations can even be contradictory: political alienation, indifference, lack of political interest, and political apathy all point to a withdrawal of citizens from political life, whereas political skepticism, radicalization, contestation, and protest behavior rather indicate a critical commitment to politics (Schedler, 1993). A lot of effort has been put into disentangling various concepts, and developing distinct operationalizations for them. Political trust has been distinguished from political efficacy, and within political efficacy two dimensions have been discerned: internal political efficacy, where the belief that one can play a meaningful political role is founded either on self-confidence (“People like me have no influence over government policies”) or on confidence in the responsiveness of the political system (“Members of Parliament are not interested in the opinions of ordinary people like me”). Some of these conceptually different variables appear to be highly interrelated, but the more practical problem is that in studying trends over time, we have to make do with the data that are available. The data have in common that they entail evaluations of the quality of democratic institutions and politicians, and all we can do is to be aware of the conceptual differences and the resulting biases that may contaminate our conclusions.

Another problem is that the word “politics” (or “Washington,” “Brussels,” etc.) is used indiscriminately, without specifying what it is that people have evaluated positively or negatively. Most analyses follow Easton’s (1965) conceptualization of political support as a dimension ranging from “diffuse” to “specific” support:

Some types of evaluations are closely related to what the political authorities do and how they do it. Others are more fundamental in character because they are directed to basic aspects of the system. They represent more enduring bonds and

thereby make it possible for members to oppose the incumbents of offices and yet retain respect for the offices themselves, for the way in which they are ordered, and for the community of which they are a part. The distinction of roughly this sort I have called ‘specific’ as against ‘diffuse’ support. (Easton, 1975, p. 437)

Norris, for example, distinguishes five components of political support: national identity, approval of regime principles (e.g., democratic ideals), evaluation of regime performance, confidence in regime institutions, and approval of incumbent officeholders (Norris, 2011, pp. 24–5). For the purpose of this chapter, I focus on the latter three: the satisfaction with the functioning of the national democratic system at the most diffuse level, trust in political institutions at the intermediate level, and trust in political actors at the most specific level. I have chosen these three levels primarily because longitudinal and comparative data are available for all three.

Since 1974, the biannual Eurobarometer survey, commissioned by the EU Commission in all EU member states, has included the question, “On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in [your country]?” at least once in most years. This provides us with an unrivalled time-series spanning almost four decades for eight countries (Belgium, Denmark, (West) Germany, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, and the UK), and shorter periods for a further eighteen countries.

If we take all respondents from all EU member states together, the percentage reporting “very satisfied” fluctuates around 8% with about 40% saying that they are “fairly” satisfied with the working of democracy in their own country. As the ratio between these two answering categories is relatively constant, I have combined the two into a single percentage as “satisfied.” Figure 10.1 shows an almost imperceptible increase in satisfaction with democratic functioning until autumn 1991, followed by a slump and a regaining of the previous high point in spring 1999. After autumn 2007, we witness another slow decline. We end the four decades with 51% of Europeans satisfied with the functioning of democracy, 3 percentage points higher than at the start of the time-series, in 1974. This is remarkable given the fact that the EU has expanded from nine countries in 1974 to twenty-seven by 2012 (an additional member state was added in 2013). The nine countries at the start of the time-series are all established democracies. The inclusion of East Germany in 1990 and the enlargements of 2004 and 2007 have added primarily countries in which democracy is relatively new and not yet institutionalized. The different degrees of socialization in democratic politics are likely to result in different levels of satisfaction with the working of national democracy. Indeed,

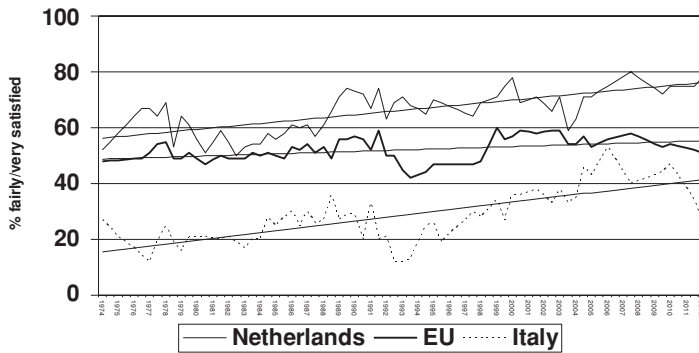


Figure 10.1 Satisfaction with the functioning of national democracy in EU member states, 1974–2012. *Source:* Eurobarometer. “S” denotes the spring survey of that year, “A” the autumn survey of that year for Figures 10.1–10.3.

there is considerable variation with Denmark, in 2012, showing most satisfaction (87%) and Greece least satisfaction (15%). Denmark is followed closely by Sweden, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, and Finland. Greece is accompanied by Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria, Portugal, and Hungary. Italy is the only country of the original member states showing a low satisfaction rate (27%). Because of the sizeable cross-country variation, two countries for which we have the complete time-series have been added to Figure 10.1: The Netherlands (high satisfaction) and Italy (low satisfaction). For The Netherlands, we see a clear upward trend in satisfaction with the functioning of democracy, from 52% satisfied in 1978 to 78% satisfied in 2012. There are considerable fluctuations around the trend line, but even the dip in satisfaction during “the long year 2002” (the rise of the populist leader Pim Fortuyn and his assassination, followed by government instability) was still above the level of 1974. Satisfaction with the functioning of Italian democracy shows even more fluctuation. The satisfaction rate in 2012 is exactly the same as that in 1974, but, despite the recent decline, here too the trend line over the whole period is upward. We see considerable variation between countries (higher satisfaction in established democracies and in countries with proportional representation: Aarts and Thomassen, 2008), and fluctuation over time, but the Eurobarometer data on satisfaction with the functioning of national democracy provide no support for the hypothesis of growing dissatisfaction with democratic politics.

There is a caveat attached to that conclusion. One of the problems with the survey question about satisfaction with the functioning of democracy

is that it may not be interpreted literally by respondents, but may, rather, measure satisfaction with the incumbent government. In particular, there is a risk that respondents who have voted for a governing party are more satisfied than respondents who voted for a party that ended up on the opposition benches. In July 1987, half of the national samples in the Eurobarometer were asked a different question: "Some people are for the present government in [your country]. Others are against it. Putting aside whether you are for or against the present government, on the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in [your country]." The two questions did not produce significantly different results (Andeweg, 1996, p. 161). However, in 1986, the EU consisted of mostly well-established democracies. Later studies found a considerable "winner-loser gap" in the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe (Anderson *et al.*, 2005, pp. 90–119; Linde and Ekman, 2003). The effect on satisfaction of having voted for the incumbent governing parties or not has also been found to be larger in majoritarian democracies than in consensus democracies, consistent with the fact that in the former type of democracy a change of incumbents often marks a wholesale shift in policy (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Anderson, Blais, Bowler *et al.*, 2005, pp. 120–40; but see Norris, 2011, pp. 209–13). The gap is also larger in countries that have been governed by the same party for a prolonged period of time: repeated losing corrodes support (Anderson *et al.*, 2005, pp. 60–5). In general, however, the size of the difference in satisfaction between winners and losers is relatively stable. If it had grown over the past decades, that would have been a sign of a widening confidence gap, but there is no sign of that.

As we move from diffuse support to specific support, the impact of the winner-loser gap on the confidence in political institutions and actors is likely to be stronger. Since 1997, the Eurobarometer survey has regularly included the question, "I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it." One of the political institutions of which this question is asked is the national government, but in that context it may just as easily be interpreted as trust in the governing parties or politicians. For that reason I have opted for trust in the national parliament (see also van der Meer and Dekker, 2011, p. 97). It seems more likely that respondents have this institution in mind when reporting trust or mistrust, but as parliament is composed in large part of politicians from parties for which the respondent did not vote, the question may be underestimating trust. For the USA in particular, it has been found that citizens distrust

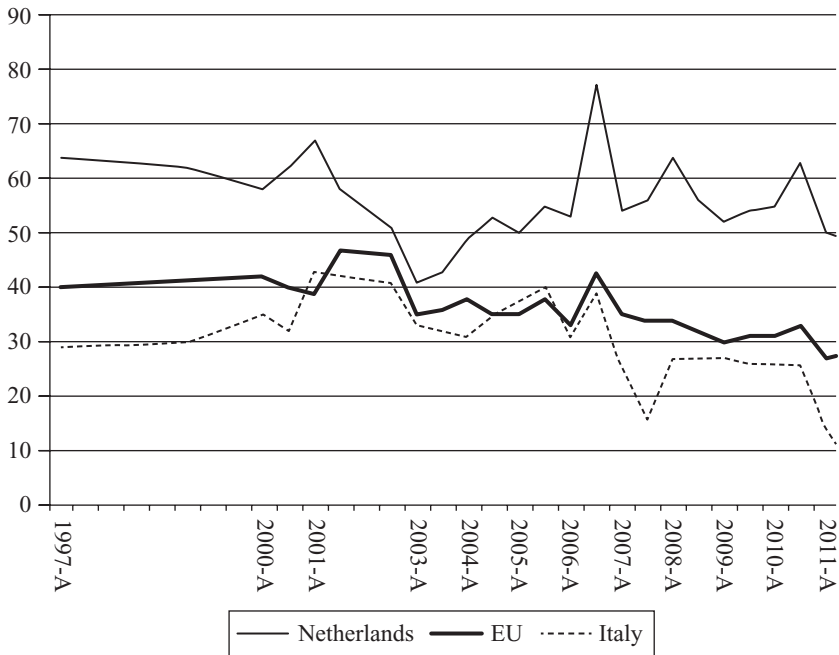


Figure 10.2 Trust in the national parliament in EU member states, 1997–2012. *Source:* Eurobarometer.

Congress, while trusting their own congressman (I return to the distinction between individuals composing a category and the category itself below). This may help explain why in twenty-one of the twenty-seven EU member states in 2012, more people distrusted than trusted their national parliament.

In Figure 10.2, we present the development in the percentage that tends to trust parliament from 1997 to 2012 for the EU as such, and for The Netherlands and Italy. Unfortunately, there are gaps in the time-series, most notably from 1997 to 1999, but it would seem that for the EU member states taken together, trust in parliaments remained relatively stable until 2003, and declined slightly in the following decade. This decline is largely due to the enlargement of the EU, many of the new member states showing low confidence in the newly democratized parliaments: Lithuania (7% trust in 2012), the Czech Republic (9% trust), and Latvia (12% trust), etc. At the other end of the spectrum, we find Sweden leading the confidence tables with 70% tending to trust

parliament, and most of the established West European democracies well above the EU average.

This is not the whole explanation, however, as Italy, a founding member of the EU and an established democracy, had the EU's second lowest percentage of trust in parliament in 2012 (8%). Confidence in parliament in Italy had increased slightly to about the EU average, but in 2007 and, in particular, in 2011, it started to fall away. It is likely that the combination of political scandal and financial crisis, culminating in the appointment of the technocratic Monti cabinet in November 2011, has negatively affected trust in the Italian parliament as a democratic institution. At least, if we compare the Italian development with trust in parliament in The Netherlands, we see a pronounced dip during "the long year 2002," but the subsequent recovery has restored confidence in the Dutch parliament to just below the previous level. Of the fifteen member states for which we have the complete time-series, seven showed more trust in 2012 than in 1997, and eight showed a decline in trust. The most substantial increases in confidence in parliament are registered in Belgium (+26 percentage points) and Sweden (+22 percentage points); the largest declines are found in Greece (-39 percentage points) and Spain (-37 percentage points). The UK presents the clearest case of eroding confidence in parliament in a well-established democracy: the percentage trusting parliament was halved from 46% in 1997 to 23% in 2012. This is likely to be related to several scandals such as the cash-for-questions affair (which started earlier, but culminated in a report on Standards in Public Life in 1997) and the parliamentary expenses scandal in 2009.

Controlling for composition effects (such as countries having different average education levels), the variation in trust in parliament among countries is in large part explained by the same factors that account for satisfaction with the functioning of democracy: the age of the democratic system (the older the more trust), the electoral system (proportional representation engendering more trust), and corruption (the less the more trust). Curiously, economic performance has little impact on trust in parliament (van der Meer, 2010).

The pattern is clearly less positive than with regard to satisfaction with the working of democracy, but the fluctuations and differences between countries point more towards rational evaluations of specific circumstances than towards a secular and overall decline of trust in the national parliament.

Finally, we turn to the most specific form of political support: trust in political actors. Note that we also shift from the singular (the democratic system, the national parliament) to the plural (parties, politicians).

In elections, citizens are asked to distinguish between several political actors, whereas, unfortunately, all trust indicators treat them as a single category or political class. People are bound to trust some parties and politicians more and others less, and it is unknown how this affects their replies to survey questions about confidence in a whole category of political actors. It is most likely that the judgment of a category is more negative than the judgment of an individual representing that category would be. This is what Sears refers to as the “person-positivity bias” (Sears, 1983), but we do not know whether the distinction is between categories and real human beings, as Sears suggests, or between categories and those individual elements (humans or organizations such as parties) to which one is ideologically close (Nilsson and Ekehammar, 1987). All we can hope for is that whatever bias results from the inadequate question wording is a constant, and does not affect any development over time. A second problem is that we lack truly comparable data over an extended period of time for individual politicians. Such data are available for trust in political parties. In most European countries, political parties dominate the political arena. Despite the widespread impression of a “personalization” of electoral politics, the impact of party still outweighs that of the party leader or individual candidates in determining the voter’s choice (e.g., Karvonen, 2010).

From Figure 10.3 it is clear that trust in political parties as a category of political actors is quite low in EU member states with an EU average of 18% expressing confidence in 2012. Although other social organizations occasionally elicited less trust in a particular country when this was measured (in particular, religious organizations and big companies), in all countries for most of the time the lowest percentages of trust were registered for political parties. The variation is considerable, however, with the proportion of the population trusting political parties in 2012 ranging from 42% in Denmark and Sweden to a mere 4% in Italy. Trust in parties is generally low in the newly democratized member states, where the legacy of party dictatorship is likely to have affected the reputation of parties generally. It is less clear why the percentage trusting parties is also lower than the European average in the UK (15% in 2012). For our purpose, the development of confidence in political parties over time is more important and here we see fluctuation but no clear downward trend in the fifteen years for which we have data. Again, The Netherlands (as an example of relatively high trust) and Italy (as an example of relatively low trust) are included. The ups and downs in these individual countries seem more related to political events (the 2002 dip in The Netherlands, the downward slide in recent years in Italy) than to any long-term change in the evaluation of political parties as such.

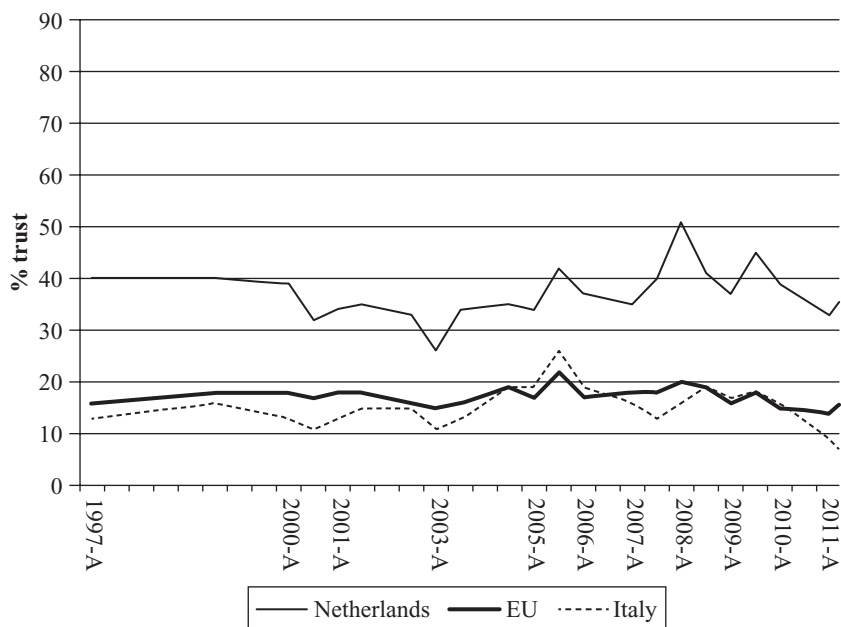


Figure 10.3 Trust in political parties in EU member states, 1997–2012.
Source: Eurobarometer.

For eight of the fifteen countries for which we have measurements for the entire time period, trust in parties was more widespread in 2012 than it was in 1997, with substantial increases of more than 20 percentage points in countries such as Belgium, Finland, and Sweden. The largest drops between 1997 and 2012 were registered in Greece (13 percentage points) and Italy (9 percentage points).

Even if political parties are the primary political actors in most modern democracies, it may be argued that trust in organizations such as parties is not the same thing as trust in real human beings such as politicians. The European Social Survey has included identical questions about trust in political parties and trust in politicians in five waves of surveys in various European countries between 2002 and 2010: “Using this card, please tell me on a score of 0–10 how much you *personally* trust each of the institutions I read out. ‘0’ means you do not trust an institution at all, and ‘10’ means you have complete trust.” The two variables appear to be strongly correlated (Pearson’s r is .885** in the 2010 survey): “The mean value of, and the variance in, trust in political parties and trust in politicians are indeed very similar, which could indicate that citizens do

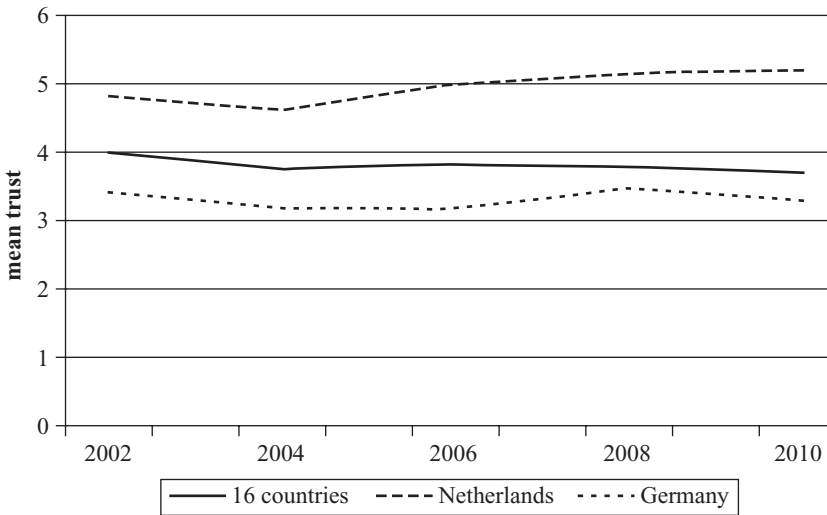


Figure 10.4 Trust in politicians in sixteen European countries, 2002–10. *Source:* European Social Survey.

not make a distinction between political parties and politicians” (Mariën, 2011, p. 19). Figure 10.4 presents the development of mean trust in politicians in the sixteen European countries in which the European Social Survey has been held all five times.¹ As Italy is not among these countries, Germany replaces Italy in Figure 10.4 as the example of a low-trust country.

The mean score for trust in politicians in these countries is at or just below 4 on an 11-point scale. Again, we find the familiar pattern of variation. The highest mean trust was registered in Denmark in 2006 and 2008 (5.61), with The Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, and Finland also showing comparatively high levels of trust. The lowest mean trust for these sixteen countries was found in Poland in 2004 (1.92), with Portugal, Slovenia, and Hungary displaying only marginally higher trust. Of the established democracies, levels of trust are lowest in Germany, the UK, and France. The European Social Survey spans a relatively short period, but, for what it is worth, there is no overall decline of trust in politicians in these nine years. The Netherlands even shows a modest upward trend, but this is exceptional and may simply represent the

¹ Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK.

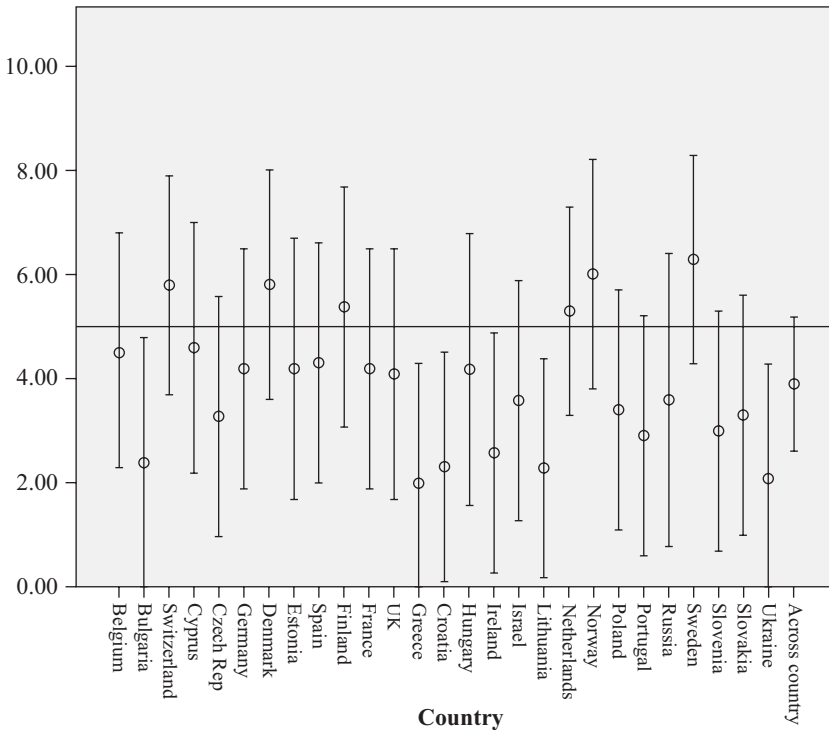
recovery after the dip in 2002 that we see in most trust-related variables for The Netherlands.

Within-country variation

So far, this chapter has focused on differences in political trust between levels (highest for the democratic regime, lowest for political actors) over time (fluctuation but no secular downward trend), and in particular across countries (lower in young democracies, and in countries with a majoritarian rather than a proportional electoral system). The emphasis on between-country variation follows from the fact that the political institutions, parties, and politicians operate primarily at the national level. However, within-country variation in political trust is higher than between-country variation as the example of trust in parliament shows (Figure 10.5; also see Rose and Mishler, 2011, p. 125).

The difference in trust between those who voted for the incumbent government and those who voted for one of the parties in opposition has already been mentioned. There is less evidence of a more broadly defined winner–loser gap in terms of higher levels of trust among dominant social groups (but see Zmerli and Newton, 2011). For example, among respondents in the twenty-seven countries that were included in the 2010 European Social Survey,² noncitizens and, to a lesser extent, members of ethnic minorities show similar or even higher mean trust in parliament, parties, and politicians (Table 10.1). Female respondents do show slightly lower levels of political trust than males but the difference is very small, and it is even reversed in some countries. The clearest indication of a difference between less advantaged and more advantaged people in terms of political trust is related to an individual's socioeconomic position. The less educated are less trustful of political institutions and actors than the better educated. The difference between the mean score for trust in parliament among respondents with the lowest level of education (lower than secondary education) and respondents with the highest level (master's degree and higher) is 0.79 point on an 11-point scale; for trust in parties this difference is 0.49, and for trust in politicians 0.58. However, the lowest level of trust is not found among the lowest educated, but halfway on the scale (4: upper tier, upper secondary education), and the highest trust is not found among the

² Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, and the UK.



NB: o = mean trust; error bar = standard deviation;

Figure 10.5 Variation in trust in Parliament within and across twenty-seven countries, 2010. *Source:* European Social Survey 5, 2010.

highest educated but just below, among those with a BA-level education). Moreover, in nearly half of the countries, the category with the lowest level of education is actually more trustful than their compatriots with the highest level of education. There are many new democracies among the countries with this reverse pattern, but also a few established democracies such as Germany and Switzerland. The evidence of a winner-loser gap is stronger if we compare those with paid work to those who are unemployed or disabled: the mean score on trust in parliament is 0.81 lower among the unemployed, mean trust in parties is 0.56 lower, and mean trust in politicians is 0.63 lower. And although there are countries with different patterns even here, the number of exceptions is quite small.

Table 10.1 *Demographic correlates of political trust (mean trust on a scale from 0 to 10)*

	Trust in parliament	Trust in parties	Trust in politicians
<i>Citizen</i>			
No	4.71 (2.68) [1,812]	3.78 (2.48) [1,823]	3.85 (2.58) [1,864]
Yes	3.81 (2.59) [49,066]	3.12 (2.36) [49,041]	3.12 (2.38) [49,286]
<i>Ethnic minority</i>			
Yes	3.8 (2.82) [2,982]	3.18 (2.58) [2,985]	3.18 (2.6) [3,022]
No	3.87 (2.59) [46,685]	3.15 (2.35) [46,686]	3.15 (2.38) [46,923]
<i>Gender</i>			
Female	3.75 (2.55) [27,595]	3.11 (2.35) [27,596]	3.13 (2.38) [27,784]
Male	3.96 (2.66) [23,285]	3.17 (2.38) [23,267]	3.15 (2.41) [23,368]
<i>Level of education</i>			
Lowest	3.54 (2.66) [6,433]	2.86 (2.47) [6,484]	2.88 (2.53) [6,532]
2	3.73 (2.59) [8,658]	3.19 (2.42) [8,659]	3.15 (2.45) [8,731]
3	3.84 (2.51) [7,372]	3.22 (2.31) [7,395]	3.21 (2.37) [7,433]
4	3.53 (2.55) [11,597]	2.87 (2.31) [11,568]	2.84 (2.32) [11,616]
5	3.97 (2.61) [6,205]	3.26 (2.31) [6,180]	3.27 (2.35) [6,220]
6	4.47 (2.56) [4,587]	3.57 (2.34) [4,577]	3.6 (2.33) [4,588]
Highest	4.33 (2.63) [5,806]	3.35 (2.32) [5,779]	3.46 (2.34) [5,808]
<i>Employment</i>			
Paid work	4.0 (2.57) [23,585]	3.2 (2.33) [23,590]	3.21 (2.35) [23,677]
Unemployed/ disabled	3.19 (2.54) [4,806]	2.64 (2.32) [4,823]	2.58 (2.33) [4,853]
Retired	3.71 (2.65) [13,620]	3.1 (2.42) [13,526]	3.14 (2.46) [13,632]
Other	4.0 (2.58) [8,750]	3.31 (2.39) [8,811]	3.26 (2.41) [8,873]
<i>Age</i>			
Up to 24	4.13 (2.56) [6,162]	3.47 (2.38) [6,234]	3.36 (2.39) [6,284]
25–34	3.77 (2.55) [7,485]	3.03 (3.32) [7,507]	2.99 (2.33) [7,537]

Table 10.1 (*cont.*)

	Trust in parliament	Trust in parties	Trust in politicians
35–44	3.83 (2.59) [8,286]	3.09 (2.34) [8,274]	3.1 (2.36) [8,298]
45–54	3.79 (2.61) [8,669]	3.04 (2.34) [8,672]	3.05 (2.35) [8,710]
55–64	3.79 (2.6) [8,630]	3.06 (2.35) [8,601]	3.11 (2.39) [8,647]
65 and over	3.83 (2.66) [11,669]	3.2 (2.43) [11,596]	3.25 (2.48) [11,696]
<i>Religion</i>			
None	4.02 (2.56) [18,030]	3.29 (2.33) [18,050]	3.27 (2.34) [18,129]
Roman Catholic	3.57 (2.45) [14,746]	2.84 (2.24) [14,818]	2.88 (2.29) [14,915]
Protestant	5.32 (2.33) [6,003]	4.5 (2.13) [5,986]	4.51 (2.16) [6,019]
Eastern Orthodox	2.82 (2.58) [7,779]	2.3 (2.34) [7,746]	2.28 (2.34) [7,770]
Other	3.87 (2.66) [3,937]	3.19 (2.44) [3,886]	3.2 (2.42) [3,937]

Source: European Social Survey 5, 2010.

() = standard deviation; [] = N.

Of other demographic correlates of political trust, age has attracted some attention. If the young were less trustful, and if this could be shown to be a generation effect rather than a life-cycle effect, we should expect a widening confidence gap in future. However, [Table 10.1](#) gives no reason for such concern. Levels of trust are actually highest among those younger than 25, and although there are several countries where the youngest age group is less trustful, the differences are quite small.

Curiously, Protestants show substantially higher political trust than Catholics, the Eastern Orthodox, and nonbelievers. Mean trust in parliament is even 2.5 points (on an 11-point scale) higher among Protestants than among the Eastern Orthodox, and 1.75 points higher than among Roman Catholics. However, we are probably measuring more between-country than within-country variation here – most Protestants live in northern European countries where political trust is relatively high, and most Catholics live in southern or eastern European countries where political trust tends to be lower. In those countries with sizeable proportions of both denominations, the difference is marginal: Dutch Protestants have a mean trust in parliament of 5.47, against 5.41 for their Catholic compatriots; in Switzerland, this difference is 0.05, and in

Germany 0.15. In Germany, mean trust in politicians is 3.59 for both Protestants and Catholics.

In general, sociodemographic variables are not strongly related to political trust. As Levi and Stoker (2000, p. 481) summarize, "Nearly all of this research, whatever its specific conclusions, agrees on one point. Whether citizens express trust or distrust is primarily a reflection of their political lives, not their personalities nor even their social characteristics." However, the relationship between personality (need for structure, social value orientation, etc.) and political trust has not been studied extensively. Political trust (whether in parliament, parties, or politicians) is correlated with generalized interpersonal trust: in the European Social Surveys, for example, Pearson's r is around .333** for the correlation between trust in fellow citizens and trust in politicians in all five surveys, and it is statistically significant in all countries. This could indicate that some people simply have a more trusting personality than others, but the jury is still out on whether social trust spills over into political trust or, the other way around, trustworthy political institutions facilitate interpersonal trust (Nannestad, 2008).

From legitimacy crisis to healthy mistrust?

Despite repeated sightings in the popular press, this expedition has failed yet again to find solid evidence of the political monster of Loch Ness. Longitudinal data based on a standardized methodology and identical question wording in several European countries are available with regard to satisfaction with the working of democracy for 1974 to 2012 (Eurobarometer), with regard to trust in parliament and in political parties for 1997 to 2012 (Eurobarometer), and with regard to trust in politicians (as well as parliament and parties) for 2002–10 (European Social Survey). This evidence shows no signs of an overall secular decline in political trust. At least in recent decades, the confidence gap is not widening. There is considerable variation over time, but it is fluctuation rather than trend, and also the fact that the young do not show lower trust does not point to a future widening of the confidence gap because of generational replacement. There is also considerable variation across countries, and these two types of variation are largely accounted for by the political reality in those countries: lower trust in countries where democracy is not yet fully institutionalized, in countries and at times with high corruption or political scandal, or in countries where the political system exacerbates the impact of being on the losing side. The variation in trust within countries is even higher, but this variation is not consistently related to differences between social groups. There is no evidence of a difference in

political trust between winners and losers in cultural terms (noncitizens, ethnic minorities, and women do not show substantially lower levels of trust). There is some evidence of a winner–loser gap in socioeconomic terms, with the unemployed in particular showing somewhat lower levels of political trust.

Admittedly, the absolute levels of satisfaction with the functioning of democracy are not impressive, and trust in parliament, and especially trust in political parties and politicians, seems quite low. However, the survey questions leave much to be desired, and the questions pertaining to trust in parties and politicians as a category probably underestimate actual levels of trust. Even if we were to accept the absolute levels of political trust as measured by available surveys, it should be remembered that in competitive democratic politics there will always be winners and losers, and it would be naive to expect high political trust among supporters of the losing side in the most recent elections.

It is even argued that high trust is not necessarily a good thing in a democracy: a certain level of mistrust can be considered healthy as it prompts citizens to monitor their political representatives closely and makes political actors aware that they are accountable (e.g., Rosanvallon, 2008). Lenard (2008) argues that this argument is valid only for *mistrust* (caution, doubt) which fosters vigilance, not for the closely related concept of *distrust* (cynicism, suspicion), which fosters abstention, but this distinction has not yet been applied in empirical research. Another way to approach the desirability of political trust is to return to Easton's distinction between diffuse and specific support. Low levels of trust in specific political actors are not problematic as long as they are accompanied by higher levels of trust in democratic institutions: when citizens mistrust not only the politicians but also the democratic institutions, the legitimacy of the democratic regime is at stake.

This does not seem to be the case. The 2010 European Social Survey measures satisfaction with the functioning of democracy on an 11-point scale, from 0 (“extremely dissatisfied”) to 10 (“extremely satisfied”). A comparison of the country means on that scale with those for trust in politicians makes clear that diffuse support is higher than specific support in each case (Figure 10.6). Strictly speaking, the scale lengths may be similar, but satisfaction and trust are different concepts. But comparing mean trust in parliament with mean trust in political parties also shows that trust at the more diffuse level is higher in all countries included in the 2010 European Social Survey, and in all but two countries included in the 2012 Eurobarometer.

In addition, if we return to Table 10.1, there is not a single social group in the 2010 European Social Survey for which trust in parliament was

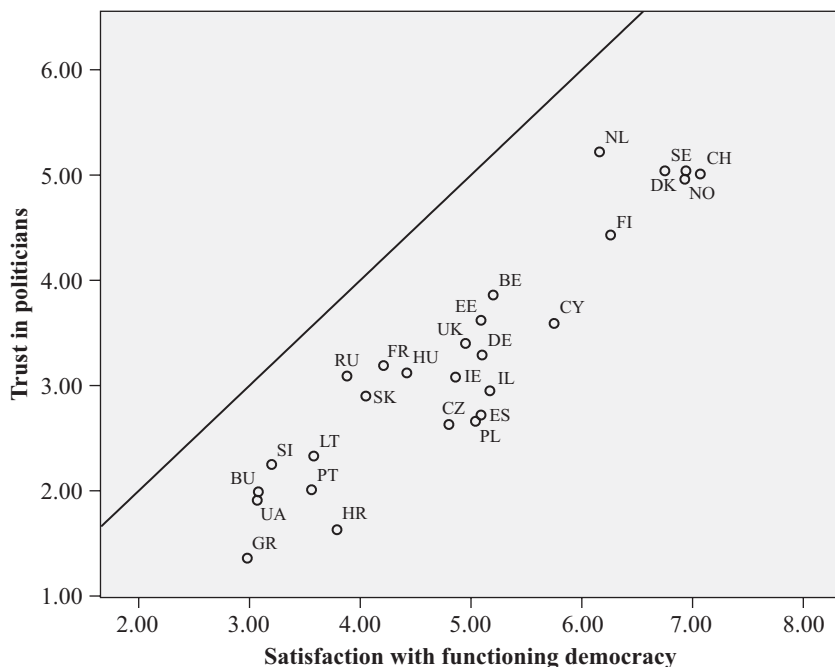


Figure 10.6 Satisfaction with the working of democracy and trust in politicians in twenty-seven countries, 2010. *Source:* European Social Survey 5, 2010. BE: Belgium; BU: Bulgaria; CH: Switzerland; CY: Cyprus; CZ: Czech Republic; DE: Germany; DK: Denmark; EE: Estonia; ES: Spain; FI: Finland; FR: France; GR: Greece; HR: Croatia; HU: Hungary; IE: Ireland; IL: Israel; LT: Lithuania; NL: Netherlands; NO: Norway; PL: Poland; PT: Portugal; RU: Russia; SE: Sweden; SI: Slovenia; SK: Slovakia; UA: Ukraine; UK: United Kingdom.

lower than trust in parties or trust in politicians. European citizens may not always put their trust in politicians, but even then they have more trust in the democratic system, in their ability “to vote the rascals out of office.” What remains to be explained, however, is the tenacity of the belief in a widening confidence gap undermining our democracies.

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III

Paranoia

11 Misconnecting the dots: origins and dynamics of out-group paranoia

Roderick M. Kramer and Jennifer Schaffer

“Germany planned this from the beginning . . . The German dream is at hand. What they’ve been unable to achieve through guns and tanks, the unified Germany is about to achieve through austerity and export-based economic prowess . . . As the euro crisis deepens, Germany has taken on greater and greater power in dictating fiscal policy to euro-zone states . . . If the euro survives, Germany will accomplish what it couldn’t through blood, sweat and tears. A German continent that serves as a vehicle for German economic and political interests . . . That’s why, if the euro survives, you’ll start to hear more of a German conspiracy. After all, isn’t this what they thought would happen all along?”

Hines (2012, p. 1)

As the quotation above nicely illustrates, perceptions of conspiracy and malevolent intent readily arise between interdependent social groups, especially when one group perceives that the actions of another pose an economic, social, or existential threat. To this point, a considerable body of social-psychological research has documented the prevalence of mutual suspicion and distrust between groups at all levels of social organization, as well as the ease with which such psychological states can develop. Distrust and suspicion have been observed, for example, between groups within public and private organizations (Blake and Mouton, 1986; Lane and Bachman, 1998), between diverse groups within social communities (Crocker, Luhtanen, Broadmax *et al.*, 1999; Pruitt, 1987), and between international groups (Jervis, 1976; Kahn and Kramer, 1990; Larson, 1997). Whether measured in terms of the seemingly intractable misunderstandings and social conflicts they engender (Pruitt, 1987) or the missed opportunities they portend (Larson, 1997), mutual suspicion and distrust have remained enduring, if unfortunate, features of many intergroup relations.

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Given the importance and recurrent nature of this problem, it is not surprising that social psychologists have sought to explicate the origins of such suspicion and distrust. One prominent approach to understanding this problem has focused on analyzing the role “realistic conflict” plays in the development of suspicion and distrust between social groups (e.g., Sherif, Harvey, White *et al.*, 1961). One basis for such realistic conflict is the interdependence groups confront with respect to valuable but scarce resources, such as land, water, fishing rights, oil, or precious metals. As Sherif *et al.* demonstrated in their classic work in this area, interdependence of this sort can foster intense competition, both real and perceived, between groups vying for these limited resources. Moreover, this heightened sense of competition can foster mutual suspicion and wariness regarding the cooperative motives and ultimate trustworthiness of the “other side.”

Concerns about relative status and comparative well-being are another major source of potential misunderstanding and conflict between social groups, often fostering mutual distrust and suspicion of the other’s actions and motives (Fiske, 2011; Kramer, 1996). Other streams of social-psychological research have highlighted the deleterious effects of basic social cognitive processes, including social categorization and out-group derogation, on the development and persistence of intergroup distrust and suspicion (e.g., Brewer, 1981; Insko and Schopler, 1998; Kramer 1991).

Each of these perspectives has enlightened scholars on the myriad sources of potential mistrust and wariness that can arise between interdependent groups. Although drawing on these previous contributions, we take a different approach in this chapter to understanding the origins of intergroup suspicion and distrust. Specifically, we elaborate on the role a psychological state we term out-group paranoia plays in the emergence of distrust and suspicion between social groups. We conceptualize such paranoia as an extreme form of suspicion and resultant distrust that arises between groups embedded in a familiar class of situations known as hierarchical trust dilemmas. In many trust dilemmas, the interdependent actors possess fairly equal status or power (e.g., two young professionals starting a collaborative project at work, but who each harbor some concerns about the trustworthiness of the other; much of the previous literature, in fact, has focused exclusively on such relationships). By contrast, in hierarchical trust dilemmas, an asymmetry exists with respect to the power or status of one party over the other, the classical example being a manager–employee or professor–student relationship (see Hardin, 2004 and Kramer, 1996 for fuller expositions of the logic and structure of choice in such dilemmas). The primary aim of our

chapter is to present a framework for conceptualizing the cognitive components and interactional dynamics of intergroup paranoia within such hierarchical relationships.

We first provide a brief overview of previous social-psychological research on intergroup distrust and suspicion. We then define more precisely what we mean by out-group paranoia, contrasting it with these earlier conceptions of intergroup distrust and suspicion. We next introduce the notion of a hierarchical trust dilemma and examine the psychological, social, and structural factors that influence the emergence of out-group paranoia in such situations. We conclude by discussing some implications of our framework and the directions future research on this topic might take.

Conceptualizing out-group paranoia

In the social sciences, distrust has generally been conceptualized as a psychological state that reflects individuals' negative beliefs and pessimistic expectations regarding the trustworthiness of other individuals or groups with whom they are interdependent (see Kramer, 1998, 1999 for recent reviews). Suspicion has been treated, in turn, as one of the central cognitive components underlying such negative beliefs and expectations (Fein and Hilton, 1994; Hilton, Fein, and Miller, 1993).

In much of the early literature, these negative beliefs and pessimistic expectations were viewed as more or less rational forms of inference, at least insofar as individuals' judgments regarding a target's trustworthiness were construed as reasonably veridical reflections of their actual experience with the target. In other words, such beliefs and expectations were presumed to be generalizations based on prior experience, and anchored or grounded in the actual interactional histories of the groups. For example, the early and influential work in this area of Rotter (1980) and Lindskold (1978, 1986) conceptualized trust and distrust as generalized expectancies that are predicated on a specific history of interaction between interdependent individuals or groups. Boyle and Bonacich's (1970) account of trust and distrust development proposed that expectations about trustworthy or untrustworthy behavior change "in the direction of experience and to a degree proportional to the difference between this experience and the initial expectations applied to it" (p. 130).

In a similar vein, social-psychological research on suspicion has emphasized that individuals often engage in fairly systematic and sometimes even quite sophisticated attributional analyses when trying to calibrate the level of prudent suspicion appropriate in a given situation (e.g., Fein,

1996). Viewed in conjunction, these two streams of research paint a portrait of social perceivers as “intuitive social scientists” (cf. Kelley, 1973) who are motivated to form accurate judgments regarding others’ trustworthiness or lack of trustworthiness on the basis of their actual experience with them.

While recognizing that distrust and suspicion are sometimes the end products of such systematic and orderly inferential processes, a number of researchers have noted that other forms of distrust and suspicion appear to be far less systematic or rational in their origins. For example, Deutsch (1973) proposed a form of irrational distrust and suspicion characterized by an “inflexible, rigid, unaltering tendency to act in a suspicious manner, irrespective of the situation or the consequences of so acting” (p. 171). The irrationality of this form of distrust and suspicion, Deutsch noted, is reflected in “the indiscriminateness and incorrigibility” of the cognitive and behavioral tendencies they engender (p. 171). According to this view, irrational distrust and suspicion reflect exaggerated propensities to doubt others’ trustworthiness or benevolence and to harbor heightened suspicions regarding their actions – doubts and suspicions which can arise even in the absence of concrete evidence justifying them.

Paranoid cognitions have long been regarded as the prototypic form of such extreme and exaggerated distrust and suspicion (Cameron, 1943). In one of the first systematic treatments of this subject, Colby (1981) defined paranoid cognitions as persecutory delusions and false beliefs which encompass individuals’ perceptions of being “harassed, threatened, harmed, subjugated, persecuted, accused, mistreated, wronged, tormented, disparaged, vilified, and so on, by malevolent others, either specific individuals or groups” (p. 518).

Although initial research focused on the most extreme (i.e., clinical) forms of paranoid cognition (Cameron, 1943; Colby, 1981), recent social-psychological research has shifted attention to the examination of more benign or “ordinary” forms of paranoid cognition. Research in this vein has proceeded from the observation that, in milder form, paranoid cognitions appear to be quite prevalent in everyday social and organizational life. They can be observed even among normal individuals, especially when they find themselves in situations that make them feel socially threatened or anxious (e.g., Fenigstein, 1984; Fenigstein and Venable, 1992; Kramer, 1994, 1998; Zimbardo, Andersen, and Kabat, 1981). From the standpoint of the present chapter, it is important to note that nearly all of this recent research has focused on interpersonal forms of paranoid cognition, and has highlighted almost exclusively its cognitive components (e.g., Fenigstein and Venable, 1992; Kramer, 1998).

In this chapter, in contrast, we develop a conceptualization of paranoid cognition at the intergroup level. Specifically, we are interested in situations where members of one social or political group develop paranoid-like beliefs and suspicions regarding another group or groups. Although we focus primarily on the cognitive engines driving paranoid beliefs and attributions, we also consider the affective underpinnings and behavioral consequences of paranoid cognitions in intergroup contexts. Accordingly, drawing on but also expanding Colby's original definition, we characterize out-group paranoia as individual group members' perceptions of themselves (and their in-group) as harassed, threatened, harmed, subjugated, persecuted, accused, mistreated, wronged, tormented, disparaged, or vilified by another group or its individual members. Out-group paranoia is thus construed in terms of both the specific cognitions group members hold about a specific out-group (or out-groups) by whom they feel threatened, and also all of the attendant affective states or feelings associated with such dysphoric cognitions (cf. Smith, 1993).

We further formulate out-group paranoia as a psychological response by group members to the specific interdependence structures in which their intergroup relations are embedded. On the basis of accumulating research, there has been growing appreciation of the affective and cognitive consequences of various interdependence structures on the development of intergroup relations (e.g., Alderfer, 1977; Ancona, 1987; Fiske and Ruscher, 1993; Kramer, 1991; Zucker, 1986). We argue that asymmetrical interdependence structures (i.e., those characterized by differences in the power, status, or dependence among groups) play a central role in the development of out-group paranoia. To develop this point further, it is necessary to consider the characteristics of such interdependence structures, and to elaborate on their contribution to the emergence of out-group paranoia.

Hierarchical trust dilemmas as contexts for the emergence of out-group paranoia

As noted earlier in this chapter, trust dilemmas are situations where two or more interdependent groups perceive an opportunity to benefit from engaging in acts of trust, but are cognizant also of the risks of exploitation or abuse associated with such acts (see Kramer and Carnevale, 2001 for a recent review). In most experimental studies of such dilemmas, symmetric intergroup relations (i.e., those involving equal dependence or power between groups) have been modeled. In real-world intergroup relations, however, it is very often the case that substantial asymmetries exist with

respect to the levels of dependence or power between two or more groups. A characteristic of these hierarchical intergroup trust dilemmas, then, is that one group possesses comparatively low power or high dependence relative to another group with which it is interdependent.

Examples of such low-power/high-dependence (LP/HD) groups are plentiful in social and organizational life (Kramer, 1998). They include, for example, groups that are disadvantaged with respect to their access to, or control over, critical resources on which their survival and well-being depend (e.g., groups that differ substantially by socioeconomic status). They include groups that experience substantial and chronic uncertainty regarding their social status or standing in a social system (e.g., token groups). They also include groups that perceive themselves to be under conditions of high evaluative scrutiny (e.g., newcomer groups in organizations or other groups whose status is still being negotiated). Because of the operation of well-known self-serving and group-enhancing biases, perceptions of asymmetries in benefits and burdens are common denominators of intergroup experience (see, e.g., Polzer, Kramer, and Neale, 1997).

From a psychological perspective, asymmetries in power or dependence have several important consequences. First, members of LP/HD groups are likely to experience intense feelings of psychological vulnerability, insecurity, fear, and anxiety when dealing with members of high-power out-groups on whom they depend. After all, these members must rely on an out-group's benevolence when it comes to the allocation of critical resources under its jurisdiction or control (Brockner and Siegel, 1996; Tyler and Lind, 1992). Yet, at the same time, there may be considerable uncertainty regarding the motives, intentions, and actions of this group. Because of these factors, concerns among LP/HD group members regarding the trustworthiness of the out-group or its members are likely to be very salient.

When doubts about another group's trustworthiness are present, judgment and choice in a trust dilemma can entail considerable attitudinal ambivalence. As Kipnis (1996) aptly observed, simply having to trust another social actor can create a strong antipathy towards both the act of trust and its object. For example, in a trust dilemma, there may be a strong desire and temptation to trust, in the hope of reaping the benefits that flow from such trust. At the same time, there may be an equally strong reluctance and aversion to trust because of the obvious vulnerabilities and risks such acts of trust create. Thus, from the standpoint of the members of the LP/HD group, the decision to trust or not trust the high-power out-group or its members creates a classic "approach-avoidance" conflict (Janis, 1989; Janis and Mann, 1977). On the one

hand, trusting members of an out-group when they are willing to act in a trustworthy fashion can lead to realization of a highly desired benefit – an attractive lure. However, engaging in trusting behavior when they lack trustworthiness can lead to the “sucker’s payoff,” a psychologically aversive outcome and one that is to be avoided. Affectively, individuals in such situations often simultaneously experience both the positive hedonic states associated with an anticipation of the fulfillment of trust, coupled with the negative affective states associated with the prospect of abused trust.

To summarize, we have argued up to this point that out-group paranoia represents an extreme and affectively laden form of heightened distrust and suspicion. Additionally, we have suggested that dependence on a powerful out-group, coupled with substantial uncertainty regarding that out-group’s trustworthiness, creates the psychological climate for the emergence of such paranoia. In the next section, we pull these two individual strands of argument more tightly together by explicating a model of out-group paranoia in hierarchical trust dilemmas.

Out-group paranoia in hierarchical trust dilemmas: a conceptual framework

Figure 11.1 depicts a model of out-group paranoia inductively derived from a number of prior empirical studies (see Kramer, 1998 for a summary of this evidence). According to the model, out-group paranoia is triggered when individuals from one group find themselves in a situation characterized by two conditions. The first condition is high actual or perceived dependence on another group (the salient out-group). To the extent that dependence contributes to a sense of loss of control over one’s fate, it is likely to be experienced as aversive.

A second factor that can trigger out-group paranoia is the presence of significant uncertainty or doubt regarding the out-group’s trustworthiness. Uncertainty in intergroup relations can take many forms, of course, including, among others, uncertainty regarding the severity of the conflict of interests between the parties, uncertainty regarding the possibly malevolent motives or hostile intentions of the out-group, and the possibility that the out-group might engage in aggressive actions that threaten the in-group’s future well-being (see Balliet and van Lange, 2013 for a more thorough and thoughtful discussion of uncertainty and its impact on trust).

This conjunction of high dependence and high uncertainty, according to the model, contributes to a heightened sense of vulnerability and

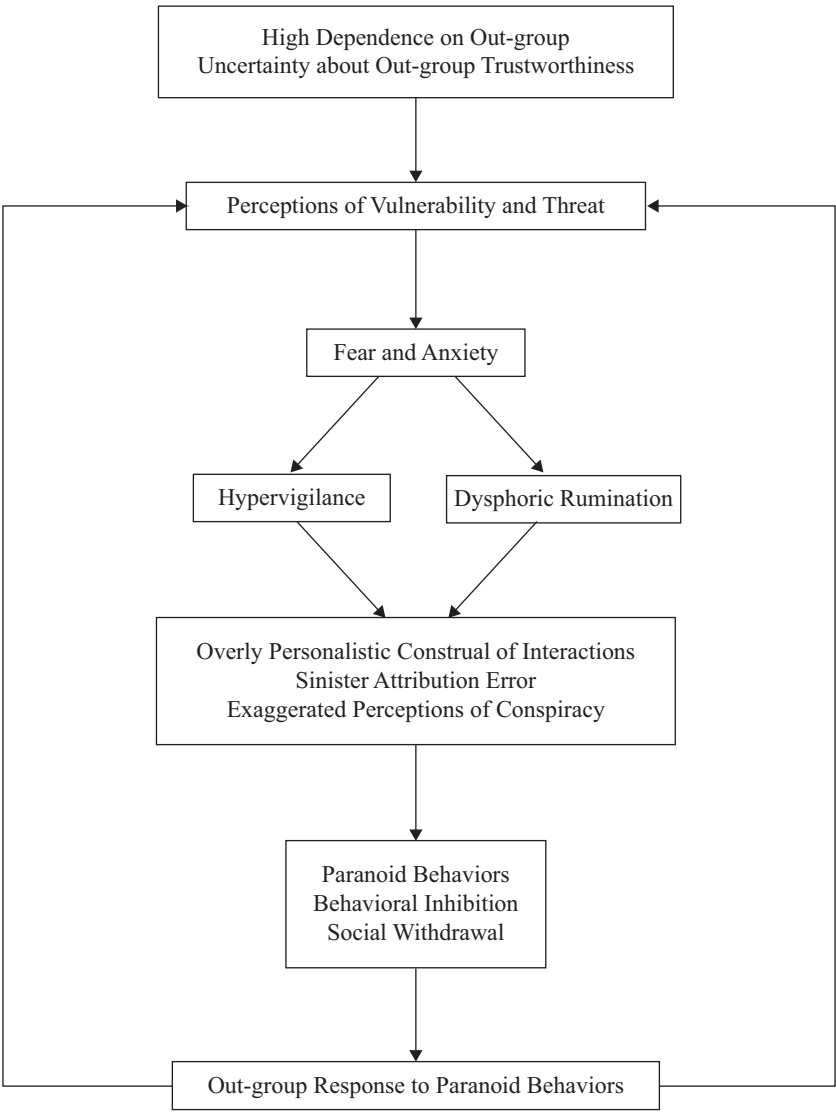


Figure 11.1 A model of out-group paranoia.

enhanced perceptions of threat from the out-group. These, in turn, give rise to heightened states of fear and anxiety.

The model identifies two important consequences of such fear and anxiety. First, fear and anxiety about the out-group's intentions and actions foster a hypervigilant mode of social information processing, whereby frightened and anxious group members tend to scrutinize and overprocess information or cues regarding the intentions or actions of the distrusted out-group, especially when that information is highly ambiguous or uncertain. Second, fear and anxiety contribute to a ruminative style of social information processing, characterized by dysphoric (gloomy and pessimistic) thinking regarding the causes and likely consequences of one's distressing predicament.

From the perspective of individuals in such predicaments, the ostensible aim of such intense information processing is accurate appraisal of the nature of the threat they face and, presumably, the formulation of some sort of adaptive response to it. A considerable body of research shows, in this regard, that moderate levels of perceived vulnerability and threat often do provoke fairly vigilant and adaptive appraisal and coping behavior (e.g., Janis and Mann, 1977; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Snyder, 1999). Such studies suggest that individuals engage in what they intend as constructive search and appraisal. In other words, their hope and expectation are that by adequately "thinking through" their problems, they are more likely to find a viable solution to them (Janis and Mann, 1977; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Wyer, 1996).

Although these positive goals may be the intended aims of such diligent information processing, research suggests a number of ways in which hypervigilance and rumination can actually undermine accurate appraisal and effective coping. For example, research has demonstrated that hypervigilant social information processing often leads to a constriction or narrowing of the perceptual field, fostering the misconstrual and overweighting of causal and social information (Janis and Mann, 1977). In trust dilemma situations, for instance, studies have shown that hypervigilance can lead to exaggerated doubts about, and overly pessimistic estimates of, others' trustworthiness (Fenigstein, 1979; Fenigstein and Venable, 1992; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Kramer, 1994; Kramer, Meyerson, and Davis, 1990).

In a similar vein, research on dysphoric rumination has demonstrated that rumination following negative events can increase pessimistic thinking regarding those events, including "worst case" thinking about others' reliability or trustworthiness (Greenberg, 1987; Kramer, 1994; Kramer, Meyerson, and Davis, 1990; Lyubomirsky and Nolen-Hoeksema, 1993; Wyer, 1996). Ironically, there is some evidence that intense rumination

can also increase individuals' confidence in the accuracy of their social perceptions and inferences. As Wilson and Kraft (1993) aptly noted in this regard, "Because it is often difficult to get at the exact roots of [our] feelings, repeated introspections may not result in better access to the actual causes. Instead, people may repeatedly focus on reasons that are plausible and easy to verbalize" (p. 410). As a result, they may conclude that their extra mindfulness of the evidence has led to better judgments regarding it.

This raises the question as to just what sort of reasons are likely to be perceived as plausible when individuals try to assess the trustworthiness of an out-group or one of its members. Past research suggests that one consequence of fear and anxiety in intergroup contexts is that stereotype-consistent information will be overprocessed and overweighted when group members are interpreting ambiguous or uncertain social information regarding an out-group (see Wilder and Simon, 2001 for a review). In particular, this research has shown that fear and anxiety interfere with the accurate processing of information about out-group members, so that social perceivers are more likely to interpret their contact experiences in terms of their pre-existing expectations and beliefs regarding the out-group. Moreover, when individuals are more anxious, they also are likely to overlook counter-stereotypic information when making judgments about out-group members.

Drawing on this previous theory and research, we formulate three specific forms of intergroup misperception or judgmental error that contribute to out-group paranoia. We characterize these three forms of misperception as (1) the overly personalistic construal of intergroup interactions, (2) the sinister attribution error or bias, and (3) the exaggerated perception of conspiracy.

The overly personalistic construal of intergroup interactions refers to the tendency for individuals from one group to interpret the behavior of out-group members as if they were directed at them personally (i.e., had the self-as-out-group-member as the intended target). A number of studies have shown, for example, that people experiencing situationally induced paranoia often make such overly personalistic attributions of others' actions, even when competing, nonpersonalistic explanations for their behavior are readily available (Fenigstein, 1979; Fenigstein and Vanable, 1992; Gilovich, Medvec, and Savitsky, 2000; Kramer, 1994; Zimbardo *et al.*, 1981). Thus, when members of one group overhear members of another group laughing in a social setting, they may feel that they are laughing at them rather than a joke that was just told by the group.

One factor contributing to this overly personalistic construal of social interactions in intergroup contexts is the "biased punctuation"

of exchanges involving in-group and out-group members. Individuals in such situations typically do not experience their interactions as continuous, ongoing streams, but instead “punctuate” them in terms of perceived cycles or units of “action–reaction” (Kahn and Kramer, 1990). Thus, for example, members of an in-group, I, are likely to construe the history of conflict with a distrusted out-group, O, as a sequence O–I, O–I, O–I, in which an initial breach of trust (e.g., a failure to keep a promise) was made by O, causing I to engage in defensive and legitimate retaliatory actions in response to that breach. However, members of out-group O may punctuate the same history of interaction as I–O, I–O, I–O, reversing their roles.

A second form of misperception associated with out-group paranoia is the sinister-attribution bias. This bias reflects a tendency for social actors to overattribute malevolent motives and intentions to the ambiguous actions of other actors (Kramer, 1994). From a normative standpoint, it has long been recognized that individuals should discount the validity of any single causal attribution for another person’s behavior when multiple explanations for that behavior are readily available (Kelley, 1973; Morris and Larrick, 1995). Thus, when situational cues cast reasonable doubt on another’s actions, people should become appropriately suspicious or wary. Other studies have shown, however, that individuals sometimes make unrealistically sinister inferences and attributions regarding others’ actions. Such overly sinister attributions are especially likely to be made in situations where negative stereotypes about the out-group’s trustworthiness already exist and therefore are easily activated (see, e.g., Insko and Schopler, 1998; Wildschut, Pinter, Vevea *et al.*, 2003).

The third form of misperception associated with out-group paranoia is the exaggerated perception of conspiracy. This refers to the tendency for members of one group to overestimate the extent to which the individual behaviors of out-group members are coordinated or linked together by some coherent motivation or goal (e.g., Crocker, Luhtanen, Broadmax *et al.*, 1999; Kramer and Messick, 1996; Moscovici, 1987; Pruitt, 1987). One of the hallmarks of such exaggerated perceptions of conspiracy is the tendency to overperceive causal connections among the actions of individual out-group members. This overperception can arise, moreover, even when their actions are, in actuality, independent and unrelated. Just as the biased punctuation of intergroup exchanges entails the overperception of episodic linkages between disparate or unconnected events, so the exaggerated perception of conspiracy entails an overperception of intentional social linkages among the actions of out-group actors.

According to the model, these forms of misperception and mis-construal contribute to several forms of paranoid behavior, including

behavioral inhibition and social withdrawal. Behavioral inhibition includes such things as reluctance to disclose personal details about oneself when in the presence of out-group members, or to engage in other forms of “risky” social behavior (e.g., telling jokes, discussing controversial issues, etc.) when interacting with them. Social withdrawal includes avoidant behaviors, such as not participating in informal social events and eschewing other forms of contact with out-group members. Note that these forms of paranoid behavior are intendedly self-protective (i.e., defensively motivated).

Because many of the social behaviors affected by paranoid cognition (e.g., the willingness to self-disclose to others, and engage in informal contact with them) play a critical role in the development of trust, such paranoia leads to a self-fulfilling pattern of suspicious and mistrustful interaction. As the figure suggests in this regard, these paranoid behaviors tend to elicit various parallel negative reactions from the out-group members towards which they are directed. Thus, when out-group members detect a reluctance to self-disclose and the desire to avoid contact with them, they become wary and suspicious as well. Thus, the reciprocal interaction dynamics created by these behaviors results in self-perpetuating and often escalating cycles of mutual antipathy and wariness (e.g., *Zimbardo et al.*, 1981).

An instructive parallel to this reciprocal dynamic has been demonstrated in research on the development and persistence of hostile attribution and dysfunctional interpersonal behavior among aggressive children (*Dodge*, 1982). Such children, *Dodge* found, enter social transactions with a strong expectation of hostility from others. They thus approach their social encounters with a state of heightened vigilance. In a sense, they are perpetually “pre-offended” and are therefore prepared to act swiftly when detecting provocations or slights from others. Because of this pre-emptive stance towards their social encounters, they end up, ironically, eliciting through their self-protective behaviors the very outcomes they most dread. In much the same fashion as these overly aggressive boys, paranoid group members remain perceptually vigilant to detect signs indicative of out-group untrustworthiness. Because they are primed for the prospect of trust abuses, they are prone, as a result, to code even ambiguous encounters as evidence of tainted trustworthiness. The paranoid and defensive behavioral stances supported by these expectations then end up eliciting the very sort of uncomfortable, self-conscious, emotionally distant intergroup interactions that further reinforce and help sustain mutual wariness, suspicion and discomfort between the groups (cf. *Gilbert and Jones*, 1986; *Gilovich*, 1991; *Kramer*, 1994; *Zimbardo et al.*, 1981). Thus, a dubious set of assumptions and nagging doubts

serve as a foundation for an equally questionable set of social strategies for dealing with them.

Ironically, even the complete absence of any cues at all can be construed as a powerful form of confirmatory evidence for the paranoid in-group perceiver when anxiety activates the stereotype-consistent processing of ambiguous information. Dawes (1988) has provided a nice illustration of this possibility in his discussion of the debate over the necessity of interning Japanese-Americans at the beginning of World War II. The question, of course, was the safety of American society given the presence of a sizeable contingent of Japanese-Americans in its midst in the middle of a war with Japan. Where would their loyalties lie? Could they be trusted? When the late Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren (then attorney-general of California) testified before a congressional hearing regarding the wisdom of internment, one of his interrogators noted that absolutely no evidence of espionage or sabotage on the part of any Japanese-Americans had been presented or was available to the committee. Thus, there was absolutely no objective evidence of danger at all. Warren's response as to how best to interpret this absence of evidence is revealing. "Unfortunately, [there are many who] are of the opinion that because we have had no sabotage and no fifth column activities in this state . . . that none has been planned for us. But I take the view that this lack [of evidence] is the most ominous sign in our whole situation. It convinces me more than perhaps any other factor that the sabotage we are to get, the Fifth Column activities we are to get, are timed just like Pearl Harbor was timed" (p. 251). He then went on to add, "I believe we are just being lulled into a false sense of security" (p. 251).

Implications and conclusions

In this chapter, we have presented a framework for conceptualizing some of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral antecedents and consequences of out-group paranoia. The construct of out-group paranoia is useful, we have argued, for understanding the conditions under which exaggerated and dysfunctional forms of distrust and suspicion are likely to develop and flourish between interdependent social groups. Metaphorically speaking, the psychological processes identified by this framework – operating in concert – make it all too easy for members of one group to "misconnect the dots" when trying to determine another group's trustworthiness – or lack thereof.

At first glance, it might appear that our framework leads one to conclude that out-group paranoia might be an overdetermined psychological state – easily triggered and quickly entrenched. As such, it would

seem to bode badly for the prospects of intergroup trust and cooperation developing between any interdependent groups, especially those with a history of enmity. While it is our view that suspicion and distrust between groups can emerge quite readily, research has identified psychological processes that may attenuate the development of escalating paranoia and run-away wariness. For example, provocative work on the system justification motive suggests a variety of psychological and social processes which can contribute to the acceptance of the status quo in intergroup relations (see, e.g., Jost and Banaji, 1994; Jost and Burgess, 2000; Jost and Kramer, 2002). Arguably, such processes might off-set or compensate for some of the deleterious factors we have identified in this chapter. Moreover, group members (and especially their leaders) are not passive or helpless bystanders to such dynamics. As recent research has amply demonstrated, there are a variety of constructive approaches that motivated groups and their leaders can take to build and sustain trust (Pittinsky, 2012). These include both behavioral and structural interventions designed to facilitate more cooperative and trusting intergroup interactions. Moreover, even in situations where trust has been disrupted or damaged, trust repair is possible if groups and their leaders are motivated and resourceful in approaching this challenge (Kramer and Lewicki, 2010; Kramer and Pittinsky, 2012). We hope future research will explore these possibilities further.

There remains one important caveat or cautionary note we should add before concluding this chapter. Although the reduction of misplaced distrust and exaggerated paranoia are laudatory goals, it is important to note that sometimes a certain level of “paranoia” may be justified and even quite prudent. For example, when the costs of misplaced trust or complacency with respect to threat detection are high, even the extreme-seeming levels of vigilance and surveillance of an out-group may be warranted.

Within many groups, interestingly, there are often one or more individuals whose perceptions of threat or danger are more accurate than other members’ – and whose paranoid-like warnings merit attention. Unfortunately, such “Cassandras” are often ignored, ridiculed, or ostracized (Kramer, 2002). For example, Winston Churchill’s persistent concerns and early warnings about the dangers posed by Adolf Hitler were discounted for many years by his colleagues in Parliament. Similarly, when FBI agent John O’Neill tried to alert government officials to the danger posed by Osama bin Laden prior to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on America, he was dismissed by many of his superiors as “obsessed” and “slightly paranoid” (Weiss, 2003). One important lesson from these examples is that organizational leaders should encourage individuals to express their concerns openly and reward them for doing so,

and should ensure that those concerns are taken seriously. One important role for intergroup leaders is to be vigilant and supportive of such group deviants. After all, as former Intel CEO Andy Grove (1999) liked to routinely warn his employees, "Only the paranoid survive!"

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12 Political paranoia and conspiracy theories

Viren Swami and Adrian Furnham

We seem to live in an incredibly credulous age. Despite the unparalleled proliferation of information (or perhaps because of it), many people appear to believe in all sorts of myths or false narratives that exaggerate, idealize, or misconstrue reality. These beliefs extend to almost all aspects of modern life, from pseudoscience (Swami, Stieger, Pietschnig *et al.*, 2012b) to pseudohistory (Allchin, 2004), as well as they way societies are governed and the motives of those who govern. In addition, many millions of people worldwide appear to subscribe to unfounded “conspiracy theories,” while denying “official” or mainstream accounts of many important phenomena.

Whether it was about Salem witches, slaveholders, Jews, Bolsheviks, or black militants, conspiracy theories have always found deep roots in society (Fenster, 1999; Goldberg, 2001; Knight, 2001). In contemporary societies, however, conspiracy theorists have found fertile ground in intelligence failures, such as in the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 (Barkun, 2003; Prange, 1986) and the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963. In terms of the latter, for example, many Americans remain skeptical of the findings of the Warren Commission Report, which identified Lee Harvey Oswald as having acted alone in assassinating John F. Kennedy (Posner, 1993). Indeed, by the early 1990s, polls suggested that over 70% of Americans believed that some form of conspiracy was responsible for the president’s death (Goertzel, 1994; McHoskey, 1995; Southwell and Twist, 2004).

The proliferation of conspiracy theories appears to have gathered pace in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, as conspiracy theorists became convinced that they had uncovered hidden plots behind the events. Many scholars have noted with some concern the spread of conspiracy theories about the event (e.g., Goldberg, 2004) and the large number of respondents who disbelieve many aspects of mainstream accounts of the attacks (Hargrove and Stempel, 2006). Similarly, in the aftermath of the bombings in London on July 7, 2005, many disbelieved mainstream/official accounts that the attacks had been

carried out by four Muslim men (Soni, 2007). However, it would be wrong to think that conspiracy theories are a uniquely Western phenomenon; rather, conspiracy theories appear to exist in many cultures worldwide (Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2004; Groh, 1987; Zonis and Joseph, 1994).

In an increasingly globalized world, and against the background of turmoil caused by financial crises, war, and international terrorism, the need to understand the nature and roots of conspiracy theories has become increasingly important (Goldberg, 2001, 2004). In this chapter, we begin by providing a working definition of conspiracy theories in the modern age. We then dissect the roots of conspiracy theories, focusing in particular on early sociological work and more recent psychological research. Finally, we briefly evaluate the place of conspiracy theories in modern societies and ask whether they can ever be a force for positive change. In so doing, we pay particular attention to political conspiracy theories in modern times.

What makes a theory conspiracist?

In reviewing the literature on conspiracy theories, various authors have expressed their surprise at the relative dearth of empirical work in the area (e.g., Swami and Coles, 2010). One reason why conspiracy theories may not have attracted much scholarly attention is the lack of consensus as to what is, and is not, a conspiracy theory. This concern might seem innocuous enough until one is faced with distinguishing between conspiracy theories and conspiratorial politics, or real clandestine and covert political activities (Bale, 2007; see also Lidz, 1978). A clear and consistent definition of conspiracy theory, placed on a sound theoretical and empirical base, is required before the study of such beliefs can progress. Unfortunately, there was – and there still is – a good deal of conceptual confusion as to what makes a belief conspiracist in nature, with scholars often relying on informal or imprecise working definitions (Swami and Coles, 2010).

Traditionally, many scholars have relied on Hofstadter's (1966, pp. 14, 29) definition, first provided in his seminal work *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, of a conspiracy theory as any belief in the existence of a "vast, insidious, preternaturally effective international conspiratorial network designed to perpetrate acts of the most fiendish character" and that aims to "undermine and destroy a way of life." Implicit in this definition of a conspiracy theory is the notion that some event or practice can be explained with "reference to the machinations of powerful people, who attempt to conceal their role (at least until

their aims are accomplished” (Sunstein and Vermeule, 2009, p. 205). In very general terms, then, conspiracy theories are a subset of false beliefs in which the ultimate cause of an event is believed to be due to a plot by multiple actors working together with a clear goal in mind, often unlawfully and in secret (Barkun, 2003; Basham, 2001; Davis, 1971; Goldberg, 2001; Zonis and Joseph, 1994).

For practical reasons, however, some authors have limited their focus to those beliefs that are potentially harmful in some way (excluding, say, the belief that Santa Claus distributes presents on Christmas Eve) and those that are unjustified based on information that is available in the public domain (Sunstein and Vermeule, 2009). In addition, Bale (2007, pp. 51–3) has suggested a set of four key characteristics that distinguish conspiracy theories from real conspiratorial politics. These are that:

- (1) Conspiracy theorists “consider the alleged conspirators to be Evil Incarnate.” That is, the conspirators are not simply actors with differing political points-of-view, but are rather “inhuman, superhuman, and/or anti-human beings who regularly commit abominable acts and are implacably attempting to subvert and destroy everything that is decent and worth preserving in the existing world.”
- (2) Conspiracy theorists “perceive the conspiratorial group as both monolithic and unerring in the pursuit of its goals.” In other words, conspiracy theorists believe that there is a single conspiratorial hub, which plans and coordinates its activities, and which possesses a high degree of internal solidarity, cohesiveness, and single-mindedness.
- (3) Conspiracy theorists “believe that the conspiratorial group is omnipresent.” That is, most conspiracy theories postulate the existence of a group of conspirators that is “international in its spatial dimensions and continuous in its temporal dimensions.” In this view, the conspiratorial group is believed to be capable of operating anywhere, which in turn allows for any negative outcome even remotely associated with the aims of the conspiratorial group to be attributed to them.
- (4) Conspiracy theorists believe that the conspiratorial group is “virtually omnipotent.” In short, the conspiratorial group is considered to have been the force behind events of historical importance and continues to use nefarious and subversive means to maintain their domination over society. The one means of subverting their influence is to heed the warning of conspiracy theorists, although that is by no means a guarantee of success.

The above definitional criteria are not meant to be exhaustive (see Mandick, 2007), but they do capture the essence of most prominent conspiracy theories, such as the belief that the US Central Intelligence

Agency (CIA) was responsible for the assassination of John F. Kennedy or that the September 11, 2001 attacks were perpetrated (or allowed to happen) by high-ranking officials in the US government. More pertinently, perhaps, it is these definitional criteria that serve to distinguish conspiracy theories from real, everyday conspiratorial politics that are carried out by groups both within and outside government. In short, then, a conspiracy theory can be defined operationally as a set of false beliefs in which an omnipresent and omnipotent group of actors are believed to work together in pursuit of malevolent goals (Barkun, 2003; Basham, 2001; Davis, 1971; Goldberg, 2001; Zonis and Joseph, 1994). Having established a working definition of a conspiracy theory, we now turn to the sociology of conspiracy theories, examining in particular their emergence and purpose.

The paranoid style

Without doubt, contemporary discussions of conspiracy theories owe much to Hofstadter's paper "The Paranoid Style in American Politics" (1966), in which he sought to contextualize the ascendancy of right-wing conspiracy theories. In coining the term "paranoid style," Hofstadter clarified that he was borrowing a clinical term to describe a political personality:

American politics has often been an area for angry minds. In recent years, we have seen angry minds at work, mainly among extreme right-wingers, who have now demonstrated . . . how much political leverage can be got out of the animosities and passions of a small minority. But, behind this, I believe, there is a style of mind that is far from new, and that is not necessarily right-wing. I call it the paranoid style, simply because no other word adequately evokes the sense of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy that I have in mind. (p. 3)

In short, the paranoid style was a result of "angry minds" that viewed conspiratorial agents as "a perfect model of malice, a kind of amoral superman – sinister, ubiquitous, powerful, cruel, sexual, luxury-loving." For the conspiracist:

[T]he enemy is not caught in the toils of the vast mechanism of history, himself a victim of his past, his desires, his limitations. He wills, indeed, he manufactures, the mechanism of history, or tries to deflect the normal course of history in an evil way. He makes crises, starts runs on banks, causes depressions, manufactures disasters, and then enjoys and profits from the misery he has produced. The paranoid's interpretation of history is distinctly personal: decisive events are not taken as part of the stream of history, but as the consequences of someone's will. (p. 22)

What's more, because conspiracy theorists traffic "in the birth and death of whole worlds, whole political orders, whole systems of human values," they do not see "social conflict as something to be mediated and compromised, in the manner of the working politician." Rather:

Since what is at stake is always a conflict between absolute good and absolute evil, what is necessary is not compromise but the will to fight things out to a finish. Since the enemy is thought of as being totally evil and totally unappeasable, he must be totally eliminated – if not from the world, at least from the theatre of operations to which the paranoid directs his attention. (p. 24)

This extended description of Hofstadter's work is necessary because it set the tone for much of the sociological literature that followed. Deeply influenced by Hofstadter, many scholars came to view conspiracy theorists as both paranoid and delusional. In fact, a good deal of research focused heavily on the psychopathology of conspiracy theorists, variously proposing that conspiracist ideation was the product of extreme paranoia, delusional thinking, or narcissism (see Robins and Post, 1997). In turn, the delusional nature of conspiracist ideation was assumed to result in an inability to effectively shape social and political action. In short, the influence of Hofstadter is evident in attempts to explain the acceptance of conspiracy theories in terms of individual (Robins and Post, 1997) or collective pathology (Groh, 1987).

Although it is quite possible that some conspiracist ideation is the result of mental illness (Wulff, 1987; see also Liu, 1998), most contemporary scholars believe that the lens of psychopathology is not particularly helpful in understanding the reasons why conspiracy theories arise. A common critique is that conspiracy theories are so widespread, not just within but also across cultures, that it implausible to suggest that so many members of society are mentally ill (Sunstein and Vermeule, 2009). Rather, more recent sociological research has sought to understand conspiracy theories as a means for members of society to explain social phenomena that are otherwise difficult to comprehend (Waters, 1997).

In actual fact, this perspective also owes much to Hofstadter, who posited that conspiracy theories are more likely to emerge among individuals or groups who feel powerless, disadvantaged, or voiceless (Hofstadter, 1971). In particular, it is thought that conspiracy theories help to make sense of phenomena that are complex, incomprehensible, or beyond one's control. By reducing and simplifying phenomena that are often unimaginable, such as terrorist attacks or great tragedy, and by tying together a series of events in relation to its purported causes and effects (Parish and Parker, 2001), conspiracy theories seemingly offer coherent explanations for human affairs that are not

otherwise forthcoming (McCauley and Jacques, 1979; Miller, 2002; Pipes, 1997).

Thus, conspiracy theories purport to identify the cause of a perceived injustice or tragedy, and thereby help individuals to make sense of the world. Moreover, in personifying that source, conspiracy theories help to reaffirm an individual's ability to shape historical events and, partially at least, offer a way to assuage feelings of powerlessness (Pratt, 2003). Certainly, there is evidence from particular populations, such as African-Americans, to suggest that conspiracist beliefs arise as a means of making sense of an individual's marginalized position in society (Thorburn and Bogart, 2005). Moreover, when participants are experimentally made to feel that they have a lack of control, their belief in conspiracy increases (Sullivan, Landau, and Rothschild, 2010; Whitson and Galinsky, 2008).

From this perspective, conspiracy theories are viewed as rational psychological phenomena that are no different from other religious, social, or political beliefs. Like these other meta-explanatory frameworks, a conspiracy theory helps to fill a need for certainty, control, or understanding, filling gaps in knowledge and offering a coherent elucidation of difficult events (Leman, 2007; Whitson and Galinsky, 2008). As such, conspiracy theories are believed to gain acceptance particularly when mainstream explanations of an event contain erroneous information, discrepancies, or ambiguities (Miller, 2002). For individuals who feel powerless, a conspiracy theory helps explain those ambiguities and "provides a convenient alternative to living with uncertainty" (Zarefsky, 1984, p. 72).

Consistent with this view, some scholars have suggested that conspiracy theories fulfill an important functional role, particularly when sources of information are limited. Given that individuals often have to rely on others for direct or personal information, it is not surprising that they often suffer from what Hardin (2002) has called a "crippled epistemology." Hardin uses this perspective to understand extremist behavior. Extremism, he argues, sometimes stems from the fact that individuals have very little accurate or relevant information, and the little information that they do have is supported by their extremist views. In support of this view, recent evidence has suggested that the type of information that individuals receive about a given event can influence their conspiracist ideation (Swami *et al.*, 2012b). Specifically, where information is uncritical of a conspiracy theory, acceptance appears to be higher than if the information is critical.

Sunstein and Vermeule (2009) have applied a similar framework to conspiracy theories: rather than being the product of irrationality or mental illness, these authors view conspiracy theories as a rational and logical manner of responding to the little information that individuals have

about a particular phenomenon. Particularly when there is little reliable information about an event or when details are ambiguous, conspiracy theories may gain acceptance precisely because they offer a coherent and comprehensive worldview. From the point of view of conspiracy theorists, their beliefs are justified in the light of the information that they have available to them, even if those beliefs seem perplexing in relation to knowledge available in wider society (Sunstein and Vermeule, 2009).

Other scholars have built on the notion of powerlessness to explain why conspiracy theories become accepted among some individuals and have posited that conspiracy ideation stems from an inability to attain certain goals (Edelman, 1985; Ingelhart, 1987) or as a means of maintaining self-esteem in the face of external threats (Robins and Post, 1997), coping with persecution (Combs, Penn, and Fenigstein, 2002), reasserting individualism (Davis, 1969; Melley, 2000), or expressing negative feelings towards out-groups (Ungerleider and Wellisch, 1979). Although these different explanations may seem diverse, they share a common assumption that conspiracy theories are not a result of psychopathological minds, but rather a rational attempt to deal with feelings of powerlessness sparked by complex economic, social, and political phenomena.

Psychological perspectives

In contrast to the above sociological perspectives on conspiracy theories, psychological examinations of the phenomenon have stemmed from cognitive science and, more recently, differential psychology. In terms of the former, one school of thought believes that conspiracy theories emerge, in part at least, as a function of the fundamental attribution error (Clarke, 2002). This bias refers to the general tendency to over-value dispositional or personality-based explanations for observed events or the behavior of others, while undervaluing situational explanations for the self (Ross, 1977). Applied to conspiracist ideation, Clarke (2002) argues that conspiracy theorists may be more likely to blame personified actors or conspiratorial networks, thereby making a dispositional inference even when adequate situational explanations are available. It is because of this cognitive bias that conspiracy theorists rely on conspiratorial explanations for events and that they maintain those beliefs even in the face of alternative, more plausible explanations.

Other work has sought to understand conspiracy theories in the context of biased assimilation and attitude polarization (McHoskey, 1995). Specifically, when an event is highly salient or becomes “cognitively available” (Sunstein and Vermeule, 2009), competing actors will seek to explain the same event from different points of view. When opposing

sides are presented with the same evidence, there may be a tendency to uncritically accept evidence that is supportive of one's own argument, while seeking to discredit contrary evidence (McHoskey, 1995). Corroborative evidence is provided in a study by Leman and Cinnirella (2007), which found that conspiracy theorists judged a fictitious account of an assassination as more plausible if it was consistent with their beliefs. For conspiracy theorists in particular, conspiracy theories may serve not only to explain the event in question but also to symbolize broader narratives about human affairs while casting doubt on alternative viewpoints (Sunstein and Vermeule, 2009).

However, McHoskey (1995) also reported that, when participants were presented with mixed evidence, there were signs of attitude polarization, in which individuals endorsed a more extreme position in line with their tendency. Consistent with this viewpoint, Sunstein and Vermeule (2009) argued that group polarization may be an important driver of conspiracist ideation. Within groups with some initial inclination, the views of others in the group may come to be skewed in the direction of more extreme positions in favor of the initial tendency. However, Sunstein and Vermeule (2009) also note that group polarization is more likely when individuals in a group have a shared sense of identity; this allows contrasting viewpoints to be dismissed more easily by the group as lacking in credibility. Conformity biases may also play a role in group polarization, with individuals professing agreement with conspiracist ideas, or suppressing dissent, in order to avoid group sanctions.

Sunstein and Vermeule (2009) have also discussed the role of the emotional content of conspiracy theories in their dissemination and acceptance. Much in the same way that "urban legends" are constructed to trigger strong emotional responses, conspiracy theories are often similarly loaded with intense emotions. By triggering a strong emotional response, conspiracy theories serve to focus attention on biased information and are thereby more easily spread to others who share similar beliefs. In addition, acceptance of emotionally loaded conspiracy theories may help to justify affective states produced by an event. There is some empirical evidence to support such an argument: one study reported that exposure to Oliver Stone's 1991 film *JFK*, in which it was alleged that the assassination of John F. Kennedy was a government conspiracy, significantly aroused anger in participants and changed beliefs towards greater acceptance of the conspiracy theory (Butler, Coopman, and Zimbardo, 1995).

Other relevant work has examined conspiracy theories in relation to the third-person effect – that is, a tendency for people to believe that persuasive media has a larger influence on others than themselves. For example,

Douglas and Sutton (2008) had participants read material containing conspiracy theories about Princess Diana's death before rating their own and others' agreement with the statements, as well as their perceived retrospective attitudes. These authors found that participants significantly underestimated how much the conspiracy theories influenced their own attitudes. A smaller body of theorizing has looked at the role of rumors and speculation in the assimilation of conspiracy theories, although this work remains piecemeal (Sunstein and Vermeule, 2009).

Personality and individual differences

Most recently, a small body of research has examined conspiracy theories from the point of view of differential psychology. Much of this work can be traced back to Goertzel's (1994) seminal paper, in which he argued that conspiracy theories form part of a "monological belief system." That is, once an individual has adopted a conspiracist worldview, new conspiracy theories are assimilated more easily because they support that particular worldview. Thus, believing (for example) that the September 11, 2001, attacks were committed by the US government makes it more likely that an individual will accept the conspiracy theory that the 2005 London bombings were committed by the British government.

There is accumulating evidence in support of the idea that conspiracy theories form part of a monological belief system (e.g., Wood, Douglas, and Sutton, *in press*). One study reported that individuals who more strongly believed in a range of conspiracy theories, such as the idea that John F. Kennedy was not assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald, were also more likely to endorse conspiracy theories about the September 11, 2001, attacks (Swami, Chamorro-Premuzic, and Furnham, 2010). A second study similarly reported that stronger belief in conspiracy theories was associated with a greater tendency to endorse conspiracy theories about the July 7, 2005 bombings in London (Swami *et al.*, 2011). More interestingly, perhaps, the same study also showed that individuals who more strongly believed in conspiracy theories were also more likely to endorse an entirely fictional conspiracy theory devised by the experimenters (Swami *et al.*, 2011).

Other related work has examined associations between belief in conspiracy theories and individual difference traits that were identified by earlier sociological work. Thus, studies have reported significant associations between stronger conspiracist ideation and higher anomie, distrust in authority, political cynicism, and powerlessness, as well as lower self-esteem (Abalakina-Paap, Stephan, Craig *et al.*, 1994; Goertzel, 1994;

Swami *et al.*, 2010, 2011; Swami and Furnham, 2012). In general, these findings are consistent with the proposal that conspiracist ideation is more common among disenfranchised, disadvantaged, or powerless groups (Hofstadter, 1966) and that conspiracy theories play a role in self-esteem maintenance (Robins and Post, 1997; Young, 1990).

In addition, two studies have reported significant associations between stronger conspiracist belief and greater support for democratic principles (Swami *et al.*, 2010, 2011), which might reflect conspiracy theorists' greater tendency to question official modes of governance. In addition, studies have also reported significant associations between greater conspiracist ideation and higher authoritarianism (Abalakina-Paap *et al.*, 1994; McHoskey, 1995), which has been explained as a manifestation of the tendency of conspiracy theorists to direct blame towards out-groups (Abalakina-Paap *et al.*, 1994). Furthermore, at least one study has reported a significant association between conspiracist ideation and lower crystallized intelligence (Swami *et al.*, 2011), which might suggest that the simplified explanations of complex phenomena offered by conspiracy theories may be more appealing to individuals with lower cognitive ability.

Several studies have also specifically examined the associations between conspiracist ideation and the Big Five personality variables (Swami *et al.*, 2010, 2011). These studies have reported a significant negative association between conspiracist ideation and the Big Five factor of agreeableness (which reflects a tendency to be pleasant and accommodating in social situations), which was explained as a function of more disagreeable individuals being more suspicious and antagonistic towards others (Swami *et al.*, 2010). In addition, there also appears to be a reliable association between conspiracist ideation and higher openness to experience scores (which reflects a preference for intellectual variety and stimulation). Swami *et al.* (2010) have suggested that more open individuals may show a greater appreciation for unique, unusual, or challenging ideas, or that their proclivity for new ideas may result in greater exposure to conspiracist ideas. However, it is important to note that the significant associations between conspiracist ideation and the Big Five variables that have been uncovered to date have generally been small ($r < .15$).

A smaller body of work has also examined the associations between conspiracist ideation and psychopathological individual difference traits. For example, Swami *et al.* (2011) reported significant associations between conspiracist ideation and paranormal beliefs, though not superstitious beliefs. Conversely, however, another study using confirmatory analysis showed that belief in conspiracy theories was associated with

schizotypy and paranoid ideation, but not paranormal beliefs (Darwin, Neave, and Holmes, 2011). Other related work has suggested that belief in conspiracy theories is associated with attempts to cope with existential threat and death-related anxiety (Newheiser, Farias, and Tausch, 2011). Such findings, when taken together, suggest that conspiracy theories may afford individuals a means of maintaining meaning or control in their lives.

What is to be done?

An important conclusion that can be derived from the above review of the literature is that conspiracy theories, far from being irrational or a sign of a pathological mind, in fact provide deep insights into the functioning of society. In this sense, it is important to acknowledge the roles that conspiracy theories play for those who disseminate and accept them, particularly in terms of empowerment in times of crisis and tragedy (Swami and Coles, 2010; Waters, 1997). Taken to its logical conclusion, it might be argued that conspiracy theories are a powerful indicator of dissatisfaction with aspects of governance, society, or politics. Only by understanding the roots of conspiracist ideation and its function in society can scholars and practitioners truly begin to address the more difficult problem of challenging false, unjustified, and harmful conspiracist ideation (Sunstein and Vermeule, 2009).

Even so, when it comes to the question of dealing with conspiracy theories, scholarly opinion appears to be mixed. On the one hand, some scholars have suggested that conspiracy theories have a beneficial role to play for societies (Clarke, 2002). For example, insofar as conspiracy theories reveal anomalies, inconsistencies, or ambiguities in official accounts of important events, they may sometimes reveal real conspiracies (e.g., the Watergate Hotel room used by the Democratic National Committee was indeed bugged by Republican officials, on instructions from the White House). In addition, to the extent that conspiracy theorists press governments for better explanations of an event, it can lead to better demands for, as well as actually improved, transparency in government affairs (Clarke, 2002; Leman, 2007; Swami and Coles, 2010).

Other scholars have offered similar arguments. Miller (2002) suggests that, in some instances, the means of addressing the credibility of governance are severely limited. In such scenarios, conspiracy theories may provide individuals with a public opportunity to challenge aspects of governance that may be otherwise circumscribed. Similarly, Fenster (1999) views conspiracy theories as populist narratives that pit “the people” in

opposition to “the power bloc” and afford space for the former to question and theorize on the distribution of power in contemporary societies. As Fenster (1999, p. 109) writes, conspiracy theories “must be recognized as a cultural practice that attempts to map, in narrative form, the trajectories and effects of power.”

Moreover, far from promoting social withdrawal or political inaction, conspiracy theories may foster and promote political mobilization (Saucier, Akers, Shen-Miller *et al.*, 2009). Fenster (1999) believes that the narratives of conspiracy theories contain the beginnings of social movements that can be a force for positive change. In a similar vein, Waters (1997, p. 123) argues that, insofar as conspiracy theories help explain misfortunes by attributing them to the planned actions of others, they should be seen “as the ultimate recognition of agency in social action.” Others have noted the power of conspiracy theories to foster solidarity among previously disparate groups and to provide new forms of authority in spaces that have been vacated by faith in traditional authorities (Goldberg, 2001; Sasson, 1995).

However, other scholars, as well as some of those cited above, have noted the very real limitations of conspiracy theories as a force for change. For example, Goldberg (2001) acknowledges that conspiracy theories can be empowering in times of crisis and tragedy, such as a terrorist attack or a financial crisis, but also argues that they actively erode faith in governance. By continually questioning authority and by closing the door to compromise, conspiracy theorists weaken the ability of governments to govern. Similarly, some scholars have noted that the simplistic nature of many conspiracy theories means that they often easily succumb to exclusionary narratives (Basham, 2003). In such cases, conspiracy theories not only lose any power to constructively change society, but also harm society with negative messages (Fenster, 1999; Miller, 2002). In short, conspiracy theories often have the potential to sow discord, and, worse still, when actors (whether conspiracy theorists or their detractors) move on unfounded beliefs, it can result in mistrust and violence.

Other scholars have likewise noted the many negative practical outcomes of subscribing to conspiracy theories, particularly among select populations. For example, several research groups have focused on the conspiracy theories held by some individuals that HIV/AIDS and birth control are plots against African-Americans (Bird and Bogart, 2003, 2005; Parsons, Simmons, Shinhooster *et al.*, 1999; Thorburn and Bogart, 2005; Turner and Darity, 1973). Regardless of whether or not such conspiracy theories are justified (consider, for example, the previous unethical research involving African-Americans, such as the Tuskegee syphilis study; Thomas and Quinn, 1991), it has been shown that belief

in such conspiracy theories is associated with less consistent pregnancy prevention and condom use and poorer knowledge about HIV/AIDS and AIDS-prevention programs (Bogart and Thorburn, 2006).

Finally, it is important to question the potential of conspiracy theories as a force for change in itself. Fenster (1999, p. 109) is perhaps most vocal in this respect, arguing that conspiracy theories frequently “leave unsettled the resolution to the question of power that [they] attempt to address.” Although a degree of skepticism is vital for the healthy functioning of societies, conspiracy theorists typically question structures of power without offering a real alternative to those structures. That is, by blaming conspiratorial agents, conspiracy theories in fact help those who seek to absolve modes of governance from blame in perpetuating and accentuating injustice. Moreover, because many conspiracy theorists deny the legitimacy of authority, they become trapped in exclusionary politics that, over time, becomes both polarized and polarizing. To the extent that conspiracy theories are unjustified or baseless, they may also divert attention from real political issues, undermine democratic debate, and weaken associated movements for change.

Given such negative aspects, scholars are now paying greater attention to the eradication of conspiracy theories. Not surprisingly, conspiracy theories have been found to be very difficult to eliminate, precisely because of their nature (Keeley, 1999; see also Kramer, 1994). For example, to the extent that conspiracy theorists segregate themselves both informationally and physically, and to the extent that they are already distrustful of authority, it becomes much harder to engage with conspiracy theorists and to challenge their claims. Even where dialogue has been established, the fact that many conspiracy theorists “consider the alleged conspirators to be Evil Incarnate” (Bale, 2007, p. 51) means that the potential for compromise is severely stunted.

Nevertheless, Sunstein and Vermeule (2009, p. 218) have proposed that, when dealing with conspiracy theories, governments have a number of options at their disposal:

- (1) Ban conspiracy theories outright.
- (2) Impose a tax (financial or otherwise) on those who disseminate conspiracy theories.
- (3) Engage in “counterspeech,” where justified and sound arguments are used to discredit conspiracy theories.
- (4) Formally hire private parties to engage in counterspeech.
- (5) Engage in informal communication with conspiracy theorists, encouraging them to help.

However, the utility of these suggested actions is unknown: banning conspiracy theories or taxing those who disseminate conspiracy theories

may not only prove difficult to implement (e.g., from a legal point of view) but may also serve to enhance the appeal of conspiracy theories. On the other hand, Sunstein and Vermeule's (2009) suggestion that governments actively try to break up extremist groups that supply conspiracy theories by "cognitively infiltrating" those groups through methods (3), (4), and (5) above may be easier to implement. More specifically, "government agents and their allies (acting either virtually or in real space, either openly or anonymously) will undermine the crippled epistemology of believers by planting doubts about the theories and stylized facts that circulate within such groups, thereby introducing beneficial cognitive diversity" (Sunstein and Vermeule, 2009, p. 219).

Implicit in this latter strategy is the assumption that conspiracy theories reflect uncritical acceptance of knowledge and that the provision of more accurate information may counter the crippled epistemology that characterizes many conspiracy theorists. To date, however, it remains unclear whether belief in conspiracy theories diminishes in the face of counter-evidence (e.g., Cook, 2003, who argues that the conspiracist mind will not accept normal modes of evidence). Newheiser *et al.* (2011) have provided some evidence that counter-evidence may be useful in reducing conspiracist ideation, although the effects may be stronger for individuals who already endorse a competing belief system, such as religion. Moreover, it seems likely that conspiracy theorists would not openly invite "cognitive infiltration" and may view such attempts, if uncovered, as further evidence as a conspiratorial plot. The strategy outlined by Sunstein and Vermeule (2009) further assumes the existence of a well-meaning government, acting in the best interests of its citizenry, which may or may not be the case.

Others begin from a different starting point. Goldberg (2004, pp. 259–60), for example, sees conspiracy theories as reflecting diminished faith in governance; in turn, if conspiracy theories are to be tackled, then it will require governments that are transparent, open, and truly democratic:

While candour and openness deter rumour and allegation, an unthinking and imperious practice of secrecy instinctively raises suspicion. Overreaction, official deception, and explanations that intentionally obscure provide opportunities for the conspiracy theorists. They thrive on public disillusionment and the loss of faith in national leaders and institutions. In such an atmosphere, intelligence failure readily mutates into conspiracy.

In Goldberg's view, it is important to begin by understanding what conspiracies say about the problems of governance so that those issues can be adequately and appropriately addressed. By targeting intelligence failures and by assessing aspects of governance that could be improved,

Goldberg suggests that belief in conspiracy theories should begin to diminish.

Others have applied a similar perspective in suggesting that conspiracy theories can begin to be tackled by addressing the causes of popular discontent. Swami and Coles (2010), for example, have suggested that the high prevalence, among British Muslims, of conspiracy theories about the London bombings of July 7, 2005 reflects, in part at least, the alienation of British Muslims from mainstream politics and governance. The solution, then, is not to further marginalize such groups, but rather to open up spaces for dialogue and to allow all citizens to actively play a role in governance. Indeed, there is evidence among African-American samples to suggest that belief in conspiracy theories is lower among individuals who believe they can influence the political process (Parsons *et al.*, 1999). In short, then, until such time as marginalized groups are allowed to participate in, and actively shape, governance, belief in conspiracy theories may remain high among some sections of society.

What, then, is to be done? Extending Goldberg's (2001, 2004) line of reasoning, we contend that blaming (whether implicitly or explicitly) conspiracy theorists for failing to participate on equal grounds with authority may prove fruitless. Rather, a more promising strategy would be to ensure that all forms of governance are transparent, open, and democratic to the fullest extent. In this view, conspiracy theorists are neither privy to any hidden truths nor psychopathological in their beliefs. Rather, conspiracy theories are extensions of the dissatisfaction and disaffection with modes of governance in many societies. That is, conspiracy theorists should be seen as desperately attempting to make accountable those governments that they believe, often with some justification, to have taken part in some form of deception. By extension, only real democratic change would set in place the foundations for a society in which harmful and unjustified conspiracy theories are weakened and ultimately extinguished.

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13 The social dimension of belief in conspiracy theories

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Belief in conspiracy theories is a widespread societal phenomenon. For instance, in 2004, according to a Zogby International poll, 49% of New York City residents believed that the US government knew in advance that the 9/11 terrorist strikes were coming and consciously failed to act. Moreover, 22% of Canadian citizens in 2006 believed that Al-Qaeda had little or nothing to do with the 9/11 terrorist strikes (for details, see Sunstein and Vermeule, 2009). Likewise, in 1963 about two-thirds of US citizens believed in a conspiracy theory regarding the John F. Kennedy assassination, a figure that was still as high as 56% in 1991 (Pipes, 1997, p. 15). These statistics underscore that belief in conspiracy theories is not a trivial phenomenon that is exclusive to a few pathological individuals, but instead deserves the serious research attention of the social sciences (see also Robins and Post, 1999).

In the present contribution, we define belief in conspiracy theories as explanatory beliefs about a number of actors who join together in secret agreement, and try to achieve a hidden goal which is perceived as unlawful or malevolent (Zonis and Joseph, 1994, pp. 448–9). One of the main research findings on this phenomenon is that conspiracy beliefs are monological in nature: One conspiracy theory reinforces other conspiratorial ideas, making individuals who believe in one conspiracy theory more likely to also believe in other conspiracy theories (Goertzel, 1994; Lewandowski, Oberauer, and Gignac, 2013; Swami, Coles, Stieger *et al.*, 2011). A recent study reveals that this monological belief system even applies to conspiracy theories that are mutually exclusive: For instance, beliefs that Princess Diana staged her own death are positively correlated with beliefs that Princess Diana was assassinated (Wood, Douglas, and Sutton, 2012).

Recent empirical studies have examined conspiracy beliefs from various perspectives. Consistent with the idea that conspiracy beliefs are part of a monological belief system, many studies have been conducted on how stable individual differences predict people's susceptibility to such

beliefs. This line of research indicates that conspiracy beliefs are predicted by, for instance, increased hostility, increased support for democratic principles, lower self-esteem, lower crystallized intelligence, lower interpersonal trust, and increased paranormal beliefs (e.g., Abalakina-Paap, Stephan, Craig *et al.*, 1999; Goertzel, 1994; Swami *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, various studies have focused on the underlying motivations for people to believe in conspiracy theories. This line of research assumes that conspiracy beliefs are a motivated response that originates from people's basic sense-making desires, leading them to actively make assumptions about the root causes of distressing social events (Hofstadter, 1966; cf. Kramer, 1998). Empirical findings indeed suggest that experiencing a threat to control makes people more suspicious about the possibility of conspiracies (Sullivan, Landau, and Rothschild, 2010; Whitson and Galinsky, 2008). Likewise, the salience of uncertainty stimulates reasoning about conspiracies, potentially increasing such beliefs when political or corporate leaders are considered to be immoral (van Prooijen and Jostmann, 2013). These findings indeed underscore the sense-making function of conspiracy beliefs, as threats to control and feelings of uncertainty have frequently been noted to prompt mental efforts to make sense of societal events (Heine, Proulx, and Vohs, 2006; Park, 2010; van den Bos, 2009).

Although these insights are important, the emerging field of research on belief in conspiracy theories has paid relatively little attention to the group-dynamic context in which these beliefs might emerge and be sustained. Notably, conspiracy theories are characterized by an intergroup context where a powerful out-group threatens the well-being of the perceiver's fellow in-group members (Kramer and Messick, 1998). This observation distinguishes conspiracy beliefs in substantial ways from other, more interpersonal forms of paranoia. The present chapter is designed to make a novel contribution by illuminating the implications of the social dimension of belief in conspiracy theories. Specifically, we pose the question of what group-dynamic processes characterize people's susceptibility to belief in conspiracy theories, and how these group dynamics differentiate the sense-making processes underlying conspiracy beliefs from the sense-making processes underlying more interpersonal forms of paranoia.

Conspiracy beliefs as perceived intergroup threat

The main assumption that inspired the present chapter is that conspiracy beliefs are intergroup beliefs that are characterized by a maladaptive method of "us versus them" reasoning. In particular, most conspiracy

beliefs can be framed in terms of beliefs about how a powerful and evil out-group meets in secret, designing a plot that is harmful to one's in-group. Common examples of such a conspiring out-group are the political elite (e.g., the US government), corporate leaders (e.g., managers from within the pharmaceutical industry, or oil companies), scientists (e.g., scientists studying climate change or evolution), or, more generally, an out-group that a perceiver fears or despises (e.g., Muslims, Jews). Moreover, the alleged conspiracy is typically held accountable for a threat that is targeted not just at the perceiver but also at the perceiver's entire in-group (e.g., fellow citizens). For instance, people may infer conspiracies from events that are truly threatening to a collective of people (e.g., a terrorist strike), but they may also perceive a threat in events that do not impose physical harm, but are nevertheless assumed to be deceptive (e.g., beliefs that the NASA faked the Moon landings, or beliefs about a governmental cover-up of evidence for the existence of extraterrestrial beings). Despite this wide variety in possible out-groups and sources of threat, conspiracy beliefs typically converge into assumptions about the existence of a powerful out-group that actively seeks to deceive, benefit from, or hurt members of one's in-group.

The idea that conspiracy beliefs are characterized by an out-group that is perceived to threaten one's in-group has strong ties with various classic social-psychological theories. Intergroup threat generally has been defined in terms of situations where "one group's actions, beliefs, or characteristics challenge the goal attainment or well-being of another group" (Riek, Mania, and Gaertner, 2006, p. 336). Such perceptions of threat can take on many forms, such as competition over existing resources (cf. realistic group-conflict theory; Sherif and Sherif, 1969), conflicting cultural values (Sears, 1988), and intergroup anxiety (Stephan and Stephan, 2000). Among the most commonly found consequences of intergroup threat are negative attitudes to and emotions about the relevant out-group, as reflected in measures of, for instance, prejudice, hostility, and anxiety (Riek *et al.*, 2006). The detrimental consequences of intergroup conflict and threat for perceptions of the out-group are also described in broader theoretical frameworks such as social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), self-categorization theory (Turner and Reynolds, 2012), or optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 2012). It seems a relatively small conceptual step from such negative out-group attitudes to beliefs that out-group members are deliberately conspiring to harm the in-group (see also Crocker, Luhtanen, Broadnax *et al.*, 1999). Taken together, these considerations suggest that it is theoretically meaningful to conceptualize conspiracy beliefs in terms of perceived intergroup threat.

This intergroup nature distinguishes conspiracy beliefs from more interpersonal forms of paranoia (Fenigstein and Venable, 1992). Whereas such interpersonal paranoia involves suspicious beliefs about the extent to which others try to hurt a perceiver personally, conspiracy beliefs constitute a form of collective paranoia that involves suspicions about the extent to which another group is trying to deceive or hurt one's fellow in-group members. This suggests that, contrary to interpersonal paranoia, the sense-making processes underlying conspiracy beliefs are guided by strong perceptions of intergroup boundaries. Drawing on theoretical insights regarding intergroup conflict and threat (e.g., Riek *et al.*, 2006; Sherif and Sherif, 1969; Tajfel and Turner, 1979), we propose in the present chapter that conspiracy beliefs are likely to be associated with feelings of rejection by the out-group, while at the same time being linked to a strong feeling of connectedness with the in-group that is perceived to be under threat. These dynamics distinguish conspiracy beliefs from interpersonal paranoia, where perceivers typically feel personally threatened by their fellow in-group members, and hence do not experience such a psychological sense of connectedness with them. In the following, we first more elaborately contrast interpersonal paranoia to conspiracy beliefs – which are a form of collective paranoia (Kramer and Messick, 1998) – in order to outline more specifically the unique social features of conspiracy beliefs. After that, we state propositions based on the social dimension of conspiracy beliefs, and review the preliminary evidence for these propositions in the research literature.

Interpersonal paranoia versus conspiracy beliefs

Interpersonal paranoia

Interpersonal paranoia refers to the self-relevant suspicious and distrustful beliefs that one may have about the evil nature of other people's intentions and behaviors. We use the label "interpersonal" here to illuminate the distinction from conspiracy beliefs, but this phenomenon frequently has been referred to as simply "paranoia" (Fenigstein and Venable, 1992; see also Combs and Penn, 2004). The term *paranoia* is often associated with mental illness. Indeed, among some individuals, paranoia is severely delusional, making it a psychiatric diagnosis, and a symptom of many clinical disorders (e.g., Bentall, Corcoran, Howard *et al.*, 2001). But milder variants of interpersonal paranoia are also common among ordinary people, and can be construed as erroneous perceptions that are driven by exaggerated distrust and suspicion of others (Kramer, 1998).

To illustrate this, typical questions to measure interpersonal paranoia ask for participants' feelings of being followed by others, their beliefs that others have hidden motives to display friendly behavior, or their beliefs that others are talking about them behind their back (see the paranoia scale; Fenigstein and Venable, 1992). A related conceptualization of interpersonal paranoia is the "sinister-attribution error," which is defined as the tendency of individuals to "overattribute personalistic and malevolent motives and intentions to other's actions" (Kramer, 1994, p. 201). A central feature of interpersonal paranoia, as well as of the related sinister-attribution error, is its self-referential nature: The actions of other people or groups are directly aimed at a perceiver personally.

Due to this self-referential aspect, it has been noted that public self-consciousness increases interpersonally paranoid beliefs. This link has been established empirically by Fenigstein and Venable (1992), who found consistent relations between public self-consciousness and the paranoia scale, as well as with measures assessing the extent to which participants felt watched when performing tasks. Likewise, it has been argued that people who feel different or "stand out" within a group – and hence experience elevated public self-consciousness – tend to overestimate the extent to which they are being evaluated by their fellow group members (Kramer, 1998). This conceptualization of public self-consciousness suggests that interpersonal paranoia is a within-group phenomenon whereby a perceiver feels like an outsider who is closely monitored, and possibly threatened, by others.

The assertion that interpersonal paranoia is a within-group phenomenon was underscored in a study by Kramer (1994), who tested the role of tenure in organizations on the sinister-attribution error. The participants were either first- or second-year master of business administration (MBA) students, who read a series of vignettes describing how they were victimized by another first- or second-year MBA student. For each vignette, they were given two possible attributions for the perpetrator's behavior – one was a personalistic attribution that implied that the perpetrator intentionally sought to hurt the target, and the other was a nonpersonalistic attribution that implied that the perpetrator harmed the target unintentionally. The results revealed more interpersonal paranoia among newcomers. First-year MBA students made more personalistic attributions than second-year MBA students for the same behaviors. Moreover, this effect was strongest when the perpetrator was a second-year MBA student. These results suggest that people who are new in a group – and hence experience heightened self-consciousness, particularly when interacting with people who have been longer in the group – experience more paranoid cognitions in interpersonal interactions.

Interpersonal paranoia reflects fundamental psychological assumptions about the generally malevolent nature of other people's intentions; therefore, it stands to reason that interpersonal paranoia is related to conspiracy beliefs. As a case in point, it is likely that both interpersonal paranoia and conspiracy beliefs are to some extent grounded in the "myth of self-interest," which states that people have a tendency to overinterpret the extent to which other people's behavior is driven by selfish motivations (Miller and Ratner, 1998). For instance, the myth of self-interest may be relied on when people deal with incomplete information to understand others' behavior. In many social situations, people do not know how other people behaved, and they "fill in the blanks" with assumptions about selfishness (Vuolevi and van Lange, 2010). These arguments suggest important conceptual relations between interpersonal paranoia and conspiracy beliefs, which both are characterized by mistrustful expectations that are related to uncertainty (Kramer, 1998; van Prooijen and Jostmann, 2013). Indeed, empirical studies found moderate but significant correlations between paranoia and conspiracy beliefs (e.g., Darwin, Neave, and Holmes, 2011; see also Wilson and Rose, this volume). Hence, it is important to stress that in the present chapter we do not intend to argue that the processes underlying interpersonal paranoia are fully distinct from the processes underlying conspiracy beliefs. But at the same time, it must be recognized that the correlation between interpersonal paranoia and conspiracy beliefs is typically far from perfect, and we argue that this is due to the social dimension of belief in conspiracy theories.

The social dimension of conspiracy beliefs

Whereas interpersonal paranoia is a within-group phenomenon (Fenigstein and Venable, 1992; Kramer, 1998), belief in conspiracy theories typically is a between-group phenomenon. One of the implications of this distinction is that the processes driving interpersonal paranoia must be conceptualized at the group level to predict conspiracy beliefs. For instance, whereas feeling like an outsider within a group may predict interpersonal paranoia (Kramer, 1994), it is less clear whether such feelings of being excluded by fellow in-group members also predict conspiracy beliefs. After all, conspiracy beliefs emerge out of sense-making processes in the context of an intergroup threat, and it stands to reason that one needs to experience some concern for the well-being of fellow in-group members in order to be motivated to make sense of social factors threatening to damage that well-being. Instead, feeling that one's entire group is marginalized in a broader social context – which may prompt feelings of intergroup threat – is likely to be a strong predictor of

conspiracy beliefs. Indeed, empirical evidence supports the notion that conspiracy beliefs are stronger among marginalized minority groups in society than among the dominant majority group.

An example of this phenomenon can be found in studies comparing conspiracy beliefs among African-Americans and those among white Americans. Various authors have noted that African-Americans are more likely to believe in conspiracy theories than white Americans (e.g., Turner, 1993). An empirical demonstration of this effect was provided by Crocker *et al.* (1999), who compared black and white US college students on thirteen common conspiracy beliefs about how the US government tries to harm the African-American community (e.g., belief that the virus that causes AIDS was created in a laboratory to infect black people; or belief that the US government deliberately assigns the death penalty more to black males than to white males). The results indicated that black college students were more strongly inclined to believe these conspiracy theories that are directly targeted at their in-group than white college students. Moreover, these findings were attributable to perceptions of system blame – that is, the extent to which realistic problems of the black community are perceived as a result of prejudice and discrimination. The latter finding underscores the role of perceived intergroup threat in conspiracy beliefs (cf. Riek *et al.*, 2006).

Various other studies support both the robustness of this phenomenon, as well as its malevolent consequences for the black community in the USA. The robustness of this phenomenon was illuminated in a study by Simmons and Parsons (2005) among African-Americans. These authors drew an empirical comparison between the black “elite” (i.e., locally elected officials in the state of Louisiana) and the “masses” (i.e., a sample of churchgoers). The results indicated that these groups do not differ in their endorsement of conspiracy beliefs. These findings reveal that low- and high-status members of a marginalized group are equally susceptible to conspiracy beliefs, suggesting that it is perceived group deprivation, not perceived personal deprivation, that drives these beliefs. Moreover, conspiracy beliefs may be harmful not only to the group but also to the well-being of individual group members. A study by Thornburn and Bogart (2005) illuminates these individually harmful consequences of group-based conspiracy beliefs. In a sample of African-Americans, they investigated conspiracy beliefs about contraceptives (e.g., the belief that birth control is a governmental plot to wipe out the African-American population). Although the precise numbers varied per specific conspiracy belief, roughly one-third of respondents indicated agreement with items referring to birth control as a means to control or reduce the black population, as well as with items expressing doubt about the safety of

contraceptives. These conspiracy beliefs were a strong predictor of attitudes towards contraceptives, as well as contraceptive use, in both men and women. These findings underscore that group-based conspiracy beliefs can have detrimental individual consequences, such as (in this particular example) the likelihood of unintended pregnancies, and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.

A feeling of group marginalization is one possible antecedent of perceived intergroup threat, but it must be noted that other antecedents of intergroup threat – such as prejudice, intergroup hostility, and ideology – are also a potent source of conspiracy beliefs. For instance, Swami (2012) found evidence for Jewish conspiracy beliefs in a Malaysian sample (example items referred, for instance, to beliefs that Jews cause economic crises in Malaysia for their own end, and that Jews are attempting to establish a secret world government). These beliefs were particularly predicted by indicators of prejudice and racism, such as anti-Israeli attitudes, social dominance orientation, and right-wing authoritarianism. It has more generally been noted that societal or ethnic groups that in the past have frequently been the target of discrimination or collective victimization (e.g., Jews, Muslims, Gypsies) have also frequently been the accused actor in many conspiracy theories (Pipes, 1997). In a related vein, differing political ideologies may also pose a source of intergroup threat, and hence a basis for belief in conspiracy theories when making sense of threatening events. This idea was illustrated by Wright and Arbutnot (1974), who, in a US sample, assessed perceptions of the Watergate affair before the Senate hearings in 1973 (i.e., before Nixon's personal involvement was proven). The results revealed that Democrats were more suspicious about the involvement of high officials, including the president, than Republicans were. This case may be special in the sense that it pertained to a conspiracy theory that eventually turned out to be true, but that is beside the point of the current contribution. It was intergroup threat, caused by political ideology, that stimulated endorsement of these beliefs.

In sum, belief in conspiracy theories is to some extent rooted in the psychological dynamics underlying intergroup threat. These dynamics suggest two core propositions that underline the unique features that distinguish conspiracy beliefs from interpersonal paranoia. The first proposition is that conspiracy beliefs emerge through feelings of collective vulnerability that are caused by rejection by powerful out-group members; this in contrast with interpersonal paranoia that emerges as a function of feeling singled out for rejection in an interpersonal or within-group setting (Kramer, 1994). Indeed, these negative intergroup perceptions are a defining element of intergroup threat, particularly when the out-group

is perceived as powerful (cf. Riek *et al.*, 2006). One may therefore predict that conspiracy beliefs are related to feelings of oppression or exclusion by the powerful groups that are the suspected actors in conspiracy theories, such as politicians and corporate leaders. The second proposition is that conspiracy theories are associated with a strong sense of connectedness with victimized in-group members (e.g., fellow citizens), as reflected in, for instance, an activated social self-construal that emphasizes similarities between self and in-group members, perspective-taking efforts, and a concern for the well-being of other citizens that are victimized by the perceived conspiracy. This second proposition is underscored by various theories on intergroup perceptions and conflict, which assume that the existence of a threatening out-group increases within-group identification, cohesion, and harmony (e.g., Sherif and Sherif, 1969; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). In the following section, we discuss the evidence for both propositions in turn.

Feeling rejected by a powerful out-group

The first proposition – that conspiracy beliefs are associated with feelings of rejection by a powerful out-group – corresponds with a frequently noted characteristic of conspiracy believers. They typically feel that they are not in touch with, or that they are being oppressed by, the powerful out-group that is accused of secret conspiracy formation (e.g., the political elite). In his seminal work, Hofstadter (1966) had already noted that conspiracy beliefs predominantly emerge because citizens feel powerless or voiceless in the political debate. This lack of participation may be associated with the experience of lacking control, which has been found to predict conspiracy beliefs in various studies (Sullivan *et al.*, 2010; Whitson and Galinsky, 2008). But more generally, one may expect a relation between conspiracy beliefs and variables that suggest feelings of rejection by power holders.

Such a relation was supported in a variety of correlational studies. For instance, Goertzel (1994) found a correlation between anomie – operationalized as feelings of discontent with common institutions in society – and conspiracy beliefs. Interestingly, these feelings of anomie partially mediated the link between minority status (i.e., black vs. white respondents) and conspiracy beliefs. It thus seems that the previously described phenomenon that minority groups in society are more susceptible to conspiracy beliefs can be partly attributed to their feelings of being rejected by legitimate and powerful institutions in society.

Other studies also reported robust correlations between belief in conspiracy theories and indicators of feelings of rejection by power holders.

For instance, Abalakina-Paap *et al.* (1999) replicated the finding that anomie is correlated with conspiracy beliefs. Moreover, various studies found significant correlations between conspiracy beliefs and variables that arguably indicate a feeling of rejection by power holders. Notably, two such variables are political cynicism and attitudes to authority, and research robustly indicates that higher political cynicism and more negative attitudes to authority are associated with stronger conspiracy beliefs (Swami, Chamorro-Premuzic, and Furnham, 2010; Swami *et al.*, 2011). Naturally, these findings are limited by their correlational nature, and an important avenue for future research is to complement these findings by testing the causal effect of rejection by a powerful out-group on conspiracy beliefs. But the findings presented here are consistent with our first proposition, which was derived from a model positing conspiracy beliefs as a consequence of perceived intergroup threat. This perception of intergroup threat may be fueled by the feeling that one is alienated from, or directly rejected by, a powerful out-group.

Feeling connected with the in-group

The second proposition – that conspiracy beliefs are associated with the feeling of being psychologically connected with one's fellow in-group members – admittedly is most speculative in our line of reasoning given the paucity of published evidence for it. Nevertheless, based on well-accepted theoretical insights, various published studies on related topics, and preliminary findings in our own lab, we will make the case that conspiracy beliefs are to some extent driven by a perception of the self as connected with the victimized or threatened citizens. This statement is consistent with, for instance, realistic group-conflict theory (Sherif and Sherif, 1969) and social-identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) that describe the within-group dynamics of intergroup threat, leading to increased identification and cohesion. Moreover, our second proposition is in line with more specific theorizing on conspiracy beliefs which assumes that such beliefs originate from a desire to make sense of distressing events (Hofstadter, 1966; Sullivan *et al.*, 2010; van Prooijen and Jostmann, 2013; Whitson and Galinsky, 2008). It stands to reason that people find societal events particularly distressing – thereby eliciting the sense-making processes underlying conspiracy beliefs – if they are perceived to be harmful to citizens that they feel psychologically connected with. After all, such psychological connections imply that the others are part of their own self-concept, leading them to experience events that harm fellow citizens as indirectly also harming themselves. Moreover, if a perceiver feels detached from fellow citizens, and is hence indifferent

to the suffering or possible deception that is imposed upon them, the perceiver is less likely to engage in sense-making processes.

These theoretical notions are reminiscent of just-world theory (Lerner and Miller, 1978), a theory that is specifically designed to understand how people make sense of the suffering of innocent others. This theory posits the fundamental belief that people generally get what they deserve – and hence, deserve what they get – implying that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. Seeing how an innocent person is victimized poses a threat to this just-world belief, and prompts a motivation to restore this belief. One possible way to restore just-world beliefs is by reinterpreting the event so that it no longer appears to be unjust, such as through victim blaming. Believing that victims somehow deserve their fate can make their suffering seem deserved (Hafer, 2000; Lerner and Simmons, 1966; van Prooijen and van den Bos, 2009). Likewise, people may restore just-world beliefs through perceived benefits – that is, the belief that the victimization event has long-term benefits for the victim (e.g., assuming that the incident made the victim a better person in the long run). These benefit perceptions portray the event as one that may have been unfair, but nevertheless had meaning and purpose (Warner and Branscombe, 2011). As such, mental strategies such as victim blaming and benefit finding serve a comparable mental function to belief in conspiracy theories – that is, to understand, and make sense of, distressing social events (Hofstadter, 1966; van Prooijen and Jostmann, 2013; Whitson and Galinsky, 2008). Of relevance to the current discussion, Lerner and Miller (1978, p. 1031) noted that these various sense-making strategies are particularly prominent when one is confronted by the victimization of others that one feels psychologically connected with. They argued that people are mostly concerned about injustice in their own direct social environment, and relatively less so about injustices elsewhere that have little relevance to their own fate.

Empirical findings indeed support the more general idea that a psychological connection through a shared social identity may stimulate perceivers' sense-making efforts when they are confronted by events that are harmful to others. For instance, Correia, Vala, and Aguiar (2007) found evidence that people's just world is threatened more strongly by the victimization of an in-group member than an out-group member. This stronger threat prompts a stronger need to make sense of events to the extent that one perceives the self as connected to the victim, which may paradoxically lead to more negative reactions under some conditions. This was illustrated by Novak and Lerner (1968), who manipulated how attitudinally similar or dissimilar participants were to another participant, and then received information that this other participant was either

normal or emotionally disturbed. The results revealed that, when the other was emotionally disturbed, participants were less willing to interact with the similar other than with the dissimilar other. Similarly, van Prooijen and van den Bos (2009) primed participants with either the individual self (i.e., the part of the self-concept that stresses differentiation from others) or the social self (i.e., the part of the self-concept that stresses similarity with others). Subsequently, they were confronted with a crime victim that was either not threatening to just-world beliefs (i.e., the perpetrator was caught and hence got what he deserved) or threatening to just-world beliefs (i.e., the perpetrator was not caught and hence got away with his crime; cf. Hafer, 2000). The results showed that when the situation was threatening to just-world beliefs, particularly participants who were primed with the social self were inclined to blame the victim. Taken together, these findings underscore that observers are particularly motivated to make sense of events that are harmful to people that they feel connected to, even though this may sometimes result in increased negative perceptions of, or behaviors towards, these people.

Preliminary findings in our own lab underscore that similar underlying processes are relevant to explain conspiracy beliefs. For instance, van Prooijen and van Dijk (2012) provided participants with a bogus newspaper article in which an influential African opposition leader, who was about to win the upcoming election, was the victim of a car crash. They manipulated the size of the threat that was imposed by this event: The opposition leader either died in the crash, leading the election to be postponed until further notice (big threat), or survived the crash with only minor injuries, and the election would proceed as planned (small threat). Through perspective taking it was also varied how psychologically close or distant participants felt towards this event. Specifically, before reading the article, the participants were either instructed to take the perspective of the citizens of the African country and to imagine that they were born in that country (perspective-taking condition), or they were instructed to evaluate the event as objectively as possible (control condition). The perspective-taking instructions increased the participants' sense of identification with, and emotional involvement in, the African country. Importantly, the results revealed the strongest conspiracy beliefs following a big threat, but only among participants in the perspective-taking condition. Thus, instructions that increased the extent to which participants experienced the self as connected to the victims of a threatening event made participants more susceptible to conspiracy beliefs.

In sum, one of the inferences from the general observation that conspiracy beliefs can be conceptualized as a form of intergroup threat is that these beliefs are associated with a relatively strong sense of connectedness

with the group that is perceived to be under threat. Although further study is necessary to provide more conclusive support for this theoretical proposition, it is at present consistent with various theoretical insights as well as with preliminary empirical findings. Such a sense of connectedness with fellow group members underscores the social dimension of belief in conspiracy theories.

Concluding remarks

Inspired by theories on intergroup threat, the present chapter had the purpose of illuminating the social dimension of conspiracy beliefs, and how this social dimension distinguishes conspiracy beliefs from more interpersonal forms of paranoia. Two main propositions emerged. First, whereas interpersonal paranoia is a within-group phenomenon that is characterized by perceivers who feel excluded by fellow group members, conspiracy beliefs constitute a collective phenomenon that is characterized by perceivers who believe that they and their group are oppressed and excluded by a powerful out-group. This distinction is reminiscent of theorizing on personal versus group (i.e., fraternal) deprivation, which pertains to the relative disadvantage that one perceives at either the personal or group level. It is noteworthy that the consequences of these forms of deprivation differ substantially, as personal deprivation leads to inward-focused reactions such as anxiety and depression, whereas fraternal deprivation is more strongly associated with outward-oriented responses such as protest and collective action (e.g., Tyler, Boeckmann, Smith *et al.*, 1997, p. 27). As such, it is possible that conspiracy beliefs similarly are more likely to stimulate action tendencies in perceivers than interpersonal paranoia, a hypothesis that needs further testing. Indeed, one might speculate that conspiracy beliefs pose a more serious danger to society than interpersonal paranoia, as these action tendencies may potentially turn violent when conspiracy believers seek for ways to free their group from the oppression that they perceive.

The second proposition that emerged in the present chapter is that, whereas interpersonal paranoia is likely to lead to feelings of individual separation within a group, conspiracy beliefs are more likely to be associated with a sense of connectedness with in-group members. Although this point has not been explicitly recognized in theorizing on belief in conspiracy theories, it may have important implications as it prompts the prediction that conspiracy beliefs are most likely to flourish in the context of disadvantaged but highly cohesive groups. Moreover, it underscores the possibility that conspiracy believers are partly motivated by genuinely social concerns such as the well-being of fellow citizens.

And going one step further, one might speculate that conspiracy beliefs are likely to be reinforced in a cohesive in-group that feels deprived or disadvantaged. In other words, the sense-making process is unlikely to be merely an individual process. Cohesive groups communicate in small networks and openly exchange their beliefs, and such social processes are likely to reinforce rather than undermine conspiracy beliefs. If anything, such processes strengthen the confidence with which conspiracy beliefs are held, and perhaps lead to individual or collective action that might be experienced as inexplicable and potentially threatening to those who are not part of this network and who do not hold such conspiracy beliefs.

In summary, whereas recent developments in the field of research on belief in conspiracy theories mainly focused either on individual differences (Abalakina-Paap *et al.*, 1999; Goertzel, 1994; Swami *et al.*, 2011) or on the sense-making motivations underlying conspiracy beliefs (Sullivan *et al.*, 2010; van Prooijen and Jostmann, 2013; Whitson and Galinsky, 2008), our aim was to highlight the dynamic social structures that are fundamental to conspiracy beliefs. The main conclusion that we derive from the literature reviewed here is that conspiracy beliefs can be fruitfully conceptualized as a consequence of perceived intergroup threat. The implications of the insights presented here may be useful in fundamental research on group-based paranoia and distrust, as well as in applications where policymakers seek to reduce, or anticipate, the paranoid responses of citizens to, for instance, political or corporate decision-making. More generally, it is our hope that the suggestions of the present chapter may inspire research and application in the rapidly emerging field of research on paranoia, distrust, and belief in conspiracy theories.

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14 Examining the monological nature of conspiracy theories

Robbie M. Sutton and Karen M. Douglas

Conspiracy theories attribute socially significant events to secret plots and schemes by powerful, unaccountable forces (Coady, 2006; Douglas and Sutton, 2008, 2011; Goertzel, 1994; McCauley and Jacques, 1979). These proposed conspiracies typically involve sinister motives and unjust actions that are withheld from public knowledge. For example, popular contemporary conspiracy theories contend that the 9/11 attacks were planned and carried out by elements within the American government (Kay, 2011; Swami, Chamorro-Premuzic, and Furnham, 2010), that Princess Diana was assassinated by members of the British Establishment (Douglas and Sutton, 2008, 2011), and that governments are hiding evidence of the existence of extraterrestrial aliens (Goertzel, 1994). Of course, such proposed conspiracies are not always false – the Watergate scandal is a good example of a “true” conspiracy. However the majority of conspiracy theories lack evidential support and are resistant to falsification (Clarke, 2002). Also, conspiracy theories may have important social consequences, such as decreased engagement with politics, society, the environment, and health behaviors (Bird and Bogart, 2003; Bogart and Thorburn, 2006; Butler, Koopman, and Zimbardo, 1995; Jolley and Douglas, in press).

There is a growing body of research examining the psychological underpinnings of belief in conspiracy theories (e.g., Abalakina-Paap, Stephan, Craig *et al.*, 1999; Douglas and Sutton, 2008, 2011; Jolley and Douglas, in press; Swami, Chamorro-Muzic, Furnham *et al.*, 2010; Swami, Coles, Stieger *et al.*, 2011; van Prooijen and Jostmann, 2013; Wood, Douglas, and Sutton, 2012). Some work categorizes believers as paranoid individuals whose judgment is affected as the result of an “uncommonly angry mind” (Hofstadter, 1971, pp. 2–3), or due to paranoia, delusional thinking, or other psychopathologies (e.g., Groh, 1987; Plomin and Post, 1997). Other correlates of conspiracy beliefs include anomie, distrust of authority, powerlessness, political cynicism (Abalakina-Paap *et al.*, 1999; Goertzel, 1994; Swami *et al.*, 2010), lack of

control (Whitson and Galinsky, 2008), and Machiavellianism (Douglas and Sutton, 2011).

On the positive side, belief in conspiracy theories has been associated with openness to experience (Swami *et al.*, 2010; Swami, Pietschnig, Tran *et al.*, 2013) and support for democratic principles (Swami *et al.*, 2011). This last finding may seem surprising to those struck by the capacity of conspiracy theories to foment political cynicism. It is less puzzling if we consider that support for the right to dissent is a key component of democratic values, and features prominently in the measure used by Swami *et al.* (2011). For example, one of the nine items is, “Everyone should have the right to express their opinion even if it differs from the majority”; another is, “Everyone should have the right to take their convictions to the street if necessary” (Kaase, 1971). It makes sense for possessors of minority, dissenting opinions to affirm the democratic right to express them. Further, research in political science suggests that those who are especially distrustful of state institutions are also especially likely to affirm democratic values (Barnes, Kaase, Allerback *et al.*, 1979). Thus, conspiracy beliefs may coincide with a sense that idealized democratic principles are being thwarted.

However, the most consistent finding on the psychology of conspiracy theories, often used as an explanation for their popularity and persistence, is that belief in one particular conspiracy theory is predicted by belief in other theories – even when they refer to completely unrelated events and protagonists (e.g., Douglas and Sutton, 2011; Goertzel, 1994; Swami *et al.*, 2010, 2011). This is an important finding for several reasons. First, it provides some support for the lay notion that there is such a thing as a “conspiracy theorist,” who, far from singling out a particular event, will tend to take a sideways view of many major events in society (for an interesting discussion of the pejorative use of this label, see Husting and Orr, 2007). Second, it shows that it makes sense to examine the psychology of *conspiracism* – that is, the situational and personality variables that predispose people to believe in conspiracy theories. If conspiracy theories did not hang together in people’s minds, it would be very difficult to research this topic – indeed, we could scarcely say that the topic existed. Instead, we would be confined to examining what leads people to accept or reject a particular conspiracy theory. We would then need to start again when examining the determinants of belief in any other conspiracy theory. Further, we would not be able to ask, “why do conspiracy theories matter?” – that is, we could not examine their impact on individuals and societies. Instead we would be confined to the idiographic study of the presumably unique and rather local consequences of individual conspiracy theories.

The key question that we address in this chapter is, why do conspiracy theories flock together in this way? In other words, *what causes people who believe one conspiracy theory to be more likely to believe another?* At first glance, this question may seem obvious or trivial: Of course, they flock together, since they are “of a feather,” sharing important semantic features. To believe in any conspiracy theory is to believe that authorities can be malevolent, that they can conceal their evil-doing, and that official explanations for major events may be lies. Accepting these premises makes it much easier to accept any other conspiracy theory.

However, this semantic similarity is not enough to explain why beliefs in various conspiracy theories are correlated. Since people’s beliefs are not always logically coherent (Billig, 1996; Monroe and Read, 2008; Rydell, McConnell, Mackie *et al.*, 2006), the shared premises of conspiracy theories do not guarantee that people who believe in one will endorse others. Further, as we have already seen, conspiracy theories vary enormously in the events they explain and the agents they blame. They also vary in their political, cultural, and semantic meaning. Consider, for example, the left-leaning conspiracy theory that oil companies plot to discredit evidence that use of their product is warming the planet, and the right-leaning theory that governments and scientists deliberately exaggerate the risk of anthropogenic climate change (Weingart, Engels, and Pansegrau, 2000). With such different and often mutually incompatible content, it is by no means obvious why these theories tend to come together in the minds of some people.

The monological belief system

The predominant explanation for the clustering of conspiracy beliefs is that they comprise part of a *monological belief system*. Goertzel (1994), the original champion of this view, wrote:

[B]elief systems can be characterized as dialogical or monological. Dialogical belief systems engage in a dialogue with their context, while monological systems speak only to themselves, ignoring their context in all but the shallowest respects. (p. 739)

So for Goertzel (1994), a key feature of monological belief systems is what we might call a *closed epistemology*. Beliefs are evaluated according to their coherence with other beliefs in the system, rather than external data.

Goertzel (1994) also identified a related but distinct feature of monological belief systems. This is what we might call a *nomothetic* (vs. idiographic) *explanatory style*. Instead of explaining a specific event in terms of a full description of the particular details of events leading up to it,

Goertzel suggests that monological conspiracy thinkers resort to generalized explanations that appeal to a (malign) pattern of events in the world:

[T]he proof which is offered is not evidence about the specific incident or issue, but the general pattern; for example, the X conspiracy has been responsible for all of our other problems, so it is obvious that X must be responsible for this one as well. For example, Crenshaw (1992) observed that black women have been racially and sexually abused by the white male power structure throughout American history. She then simply assumed that Anita Hill's allegations should be viewed as an example of this pattern, never stopping to examine the factual basis for the particular allegations at hand.¹ (p. 741)

In sum, Goertzel (1994) identifies two key features of the monological conspiracist mind-set: a closed epistemology in which adherents are indifferent to evidence, preferring to rely on their previous beliefs, and a nomothetic explanatory style in which each event is explained in terms of general patterns in the world rather than the unique, proximal conditions that might have brought it about. These two forces combine to bring conspiracy theories together in an adherent's mind. Once a conspiracy theory is accepted, it provides internal epistemological support for other conspiracy beliefs. Further, believing in several conspiracy theories creates a subjective world in which events are frequently orchestrated by sinister forces, and this pattern serves as a schematic framework for explaining new events. Note that this set of psychological processes is relatively cold or unmotivated. If it is motivated, the motive is to protect "the belief system" from disconfirmation:

Conspiratorial beliefs are useful in monological belief systems since they provide an easy, automatic explanation for any new phenomenon which might threaten the belief system. In a monological belief system, each of the beliefs serves as evidence for each of the other beliefs. The more conspiracies a monological thinker believes in, the more likely he or she is to believe in any new conspiracy theory which may be proposed. Thus African-Americans, who are more likely to be aware of the Tuskegee syphilis conspiracy, are predisposed to believe that AIDS may also be a conspiracy, while this idea may seem absurd to people who are unfamiliar with past medical abuses. (Goertzel, 1994, p. 740)

Problems for the monological position

As elegant as it is, there are several major problems with the monological belief system's position on conspiracy theorizing, which we shall now

¹ Goertzel refers to allegations of sexual harassment, made in televised hearings in 1991, by Anita Hill against Clarence Thomas, who was nominated for appointment to the US Supreme Court. The case sharply divided public opinion.

outline. We suggest that the monological view glosses over the fact that conspiracy theories are not necessarily mutually supportive, that it lacks evidence, that it is not parsimonious, and that alternatives are more plausible.

Conspiracy theories are not mutually supportive

Some conspiracy theories do not support one another and may indeed provide mutually contradictory explanations for the same event. For example, conspiracy theories surrounding the death of Princess Diana vary widely – some propose that she was assassinated by secret agents on behalf of the royal family, others argue that she was assassinated by Mohamed Al-Fayed’s business partners, and others allege that she faked her own death and is still living somewhere in isolation, away from the prying eyes of the paparazzi. If indeed Princess Diana was assassinated, the royal family and Al-Fayed’s business partners could not both have been independently responsible for her death. Also, she cannot be both dead and alive at the same time. So, these conspiracy theories cannot be mutually supportive. In a closed epistemology, in which people’s beliefs in conspiracy A are a primary resource for assessing the truth of mutually incompatible conspiracy B, believers in A ought to be especially likely to reject B.

Some of our research shows clearly that this does not happen (Wood *et al.*, 2012). We first examined relationships between a range of conspiracy theories surrounding the death of Princess Diana (Study 1). Here, we established that participants’ agreement with “dead” conspiracy theories (e.g., there was an official campaign to kill Diana) were *positively* correlated with their endorsement of the “alive” conspiracy theory (i.e., Diana faked her own death). In a second study, we examined similar conspiracy theories surrounding the death of Osama bin Laden and again found that participants who endorsed the theory that bin Laden was already dead at the time of the raid in Pakistan also tended to endorse the theory that he is still alive somewhere. Crucially, we also included an additional question to test the hypothesis that an overarching belief concerning a cover-up may explain why people hold mutually contradictory conspiracy beliefs. We asked participants to rate their agreement with the statement that the Obama government is “hiding some important or damaging piece of information.” The results revealed that the correlation between “dead” and “alive” conspiracy theories was no longer significant when participants’ level of agreement that there was a cover-up was taken into account.

Conspiracy theories therefore appear to be defined not by their adherence to a particular account, but by the belief that some kind of deception is taking place. Along a similar vein to an argument advanced by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson *et al.* (1950) concerning incompatible anti-Semitic attitudes, incompatible conspiracy beliefs may be held concurrently because they are explained by their coherence with “nuclear ideas” that pull ideas together to form an ideological system. To be fair, it might be that these findings merely require us to refine, rather than discard, the monological view of conspiracy theories. Perhaps some conspiracy theories are mutually contradictory, but they are mutually supportive in that they each feed, and are fed by, a central distrust of authority. Nonetheless, it is clearly misleading to contrast conspiracy theories only with official, nonconspiracist accounts of events. It is also necessary to contrast them with each other. As soon as we do this, we see that they do not live in the straightforwardly internally consistent symbiosis implied by the monological account.

Lack of evidence

A more serious problem is that there is no empirical evidence for key tenets of the monological position. It is clear that conspiracy beliefs are positively correlated (e.g., Goertzel, 1994; Swami *et al.*, 2011, 2013), but it is not clear why. For example, the monological view holds that conspiracy theorists are especially prone to a nomothetic explanatory style, but there is no evidence that these people explain events in more abstract, general, less case-specific terms. Indeed, even a cursory examination of websites devoted to conspiracies, such as that of the 9/11 Truth Movement, appears to reveal a deep rhetorical attachment to case-specific facts, true or not, regarding the melting point of steel, the burning temperature of aviation fuel, the way the buildings collapsed, and the collapse of neighboring buildings, *inter alia* (see also Griffin, 2009).

Further, there is little evidence that conspiracy theorists have a generally closed epistemology. Indeed, some findings suggest that such individuals may tend to be somewhat more open to experience (Swami *et al.*, 2010, 2013). To be sure, there is something inherent in a conspiracy belief that may make disconfirmation difficult, since these beliefs cast doubt on usually trusted sources of information (Wood *et al.*, 2012). Thus, efforts by authorities to dispel conspiracy theories are likely to fail and even to backfire – new official explanations or evidence may be disbelieved and, even worse, seen as further evidence of a cover-up (Sunstein and Vermeule, 2009). This property of conspiracy theories may make

them effective *memes* – that is, cognitive representations that tend to withstand disconfirmation and become culturally entrenched (Dawkins, 1976; Mesoudi, 2009). However, even if research eventually shows conspiracy theories to be resistant to evidence, this would not mean that the people who believe in them have a more general, closed-minded mind-set more generally. In other words, we cannot necessarily extrapolate from properties of the “sin” (a conspiracy theory) to broader dispositions of the “sinner” (a conspiracy theorist).

Lack of parsimony and viability of simpler alternatives

A related problem for the position is that it is not parsimonious: The correlations among various conspiracy beliefs can be explained in other, simpler ways, without invoking a closed epistemology or a nomothetic explanatory style. Recall, for example, the principle of “spurious correlation” from basic statistical training. If variable A predicts variables B and C, B and C will tend to be correlated, even if there is no causal relation between them. Thus, conspiracy beliefs would tend to be associated with each other, so long as they were affected by a common predictor. This would be true even if they had no causal relationship to each other, or, indeed, nothing else in common. And of course, conspiracy theories do have certain semantic features in common, so that their shared relationship with predictors is by no means coincidental. Specifically, because of their shared meaning, they tend to satisfy the same needs, appealing to people with similar personality profiles, and with similar cognitive styles and worldviews.

Example 1: need for control An example of a shared predictor of conspiracy belief is the need for control. Theorists have suggested that conspiracy theories have a palliative function for people who feel they lack control over their social environment. They do so by offering a neat explanation for lack of control; specifically, that events are wrested out of the people’s hands by the malign, covert activities of elites (Hofstadter, 1971). Further, they offer a sense of secondary control – even if people cannot control events, they can at least believe that they have secured privileged insights into the activities of powerful groups. Different lines of evidence support this view. For example, disadvantaged groups who lack objective control of their lives tend to endorse conspiracy theories more strongly (Goertzel, 1994; Parsons, Simmons, Shinhoster *et al.*, 1999). Whitson and Galinsky (2008) argued that lacking objective control causes people to restore a sense of control by finding patterns in the environment, such as conspiracies. They experimentally

manipulated the sense of control by asking participants to recall a time they had, or lacked, control. Participants in the low-control condition were more likely to endorse conspiracy theories. They were also more likely to perceive patterns in random visual stimulus arrays.

Example 2: personality variables The relationship between personality variables and belief in conspiracy theories has also been well documented. Since conspiracy theories posit that authorities are untrustworthy, they tend to be correlated with personality variables associated with mistrust and suspicion. These include anomie, low levels of trust, paranoia, and negative attitudes to authority (Abalakina-Paap *et al.*, 1999; Grzesiak-Feldman and Ejsmont, 2008; Kofta and Sedek, 2005). A study by Swami *et al.* (2010) provides vivid evidence of the ability of personality factors to bind conspiracy theories together statistically. Even when beliefs in other conspiracy theories were controlled for, belief in conspiracy theories about the July 7, 2005 terrorist attacks in London were associated with political cynicism, low agreeableness, and negative attitudes to authority.

Example 3: beliefs about the self People generally want to explain socially significant events such as the deaths of celebrities and major international disasters (e.g., Leman and Cinnirella, 2007; Weiner, 1985), but lack direct access to definitive proof of the truth or otherwise of a conspiracy theory. Even the educated middle classes of functioning democracies need to rely on second, third, and *n*th hand reportage and interpretation in media channels, since they lack direct access to the facts (Sutton, 2010). Writing from a political science perspective, Sunstein and Vermeule (2009) speculate that communities who lack even this information tend to be more susceptible to conspiracy theorizing. These communities include disadvantaged and marginalized groups, and citizens of highly authoritarian states. Such communities experience “a sharply limited number of (relevant) informational sources,” which leads them to experience “crippled epistemologies” in which they are forced to rely on unreliable sources (p. 204). As psychologists, we would suggest that lack of knowledge, however severe, forces members of the public to rely not only on indirect and unreliable sources but also on cognitive heuristics that allow workable, even if unreliable, inferences in the face of incomplete information. One such heuristic is projection: using beliefs about the self as a basis to evaluate claims about other people.

Specifically, we contend that the social-cognitive tool of projection can help people in these uncertain situations (Ames, 2004; Krueger, 2000; McCloskey, 1958). When people are unsure about what someone

may or may not have done, they can use their own thoughts, feelings, motivations, or action tendencies as a source of information. That is, they can judge others by judging what they themselves think they would do. For example, people may be more likely to adopt the hypothesis that Princess Diana was assassinated if they believe that they, personally, would be willing to take part in this act if they were in the same situation. So, a person's perception that "I would do it" informs their perception that "others did it." Beliefs in conspiracy theories – even about completely unrelated events – may therefore be held together by people's judgments of their own moral tendencies.

We tested the role of projection in two studies (Douglas and Sutton, 2011). In the first study, we asked participants to complete the scale for Machiavellianism – an individual differences variable associated with personal morality (Christie and Geis, 1970). Measuring Machiavellianism allowed us to test the prediction that the relationship between personal moral qualities and beliefs in conspiracy theories would be mediated by projection of those moral qualities onto others. We asked participants to rate their agreement with a range of conspiracy theories and measured their tendency to project by asking them, for each individual conspiracy theory, how willing they would have been to participate in the conspiracy themselves (e.g., "If you had been in the position of the US government, would you have ordered the attack on the Twin Towers on 9/11?"). As hypothesized, Machiavellianism predicted participants' agreement with conspiracy theories. Also, participants' personal willingness to conspire predicted the extent to which they endorsed the conspiracy theories. This mediated the relationship between Machiavellianism and endorsement of conspiracy theories.

In a second study, we experimentally manipulated participants' feelings of personal morality. We reasoned that by recalling a time when they behaved in a moral and decent manner, people would perceive themselves as less likely to participate in conspiracies. As predicted, participants asked to remember a time when they helped someone in need were subsequently less willing to conspire than control participants. They also endorsed a range of conspiracy theories less strongly. This decline in conspiracy belief was mediated by a decrease in willingness to conspire. These two studies, taken together, suggest that conspiracy theories may be held together by projection. Beliefs may not support each other, but instead may be held together by believers' perception of their own moral tendencies (Douglas and Sutton, 2011).

Example 4: beliefs about the world As well as beliefs about the self, beliefs about the world are important in conspiracy theories. According to just-world theory, children develop a need to believe that the world is

a just place, in which people get what they deserve. This need remains throughout adulthood, since believing in justice allows people to plan and work towards the future with confidence that their efforts and moral conduct will be rewarded (Lerner, 1980). There is abundant evidential support for this theory. Just-world beliefs shape people's mental health, behaviors, and many of their social and political attitudes (Furnham, 2003; Hafer and Bègue, 2005; Sutton, Douglas, Wilkin *et al.*, 2008).

Importantly, a just world can be contrasted with two alternatives. One is a world in which events are random, or at least not shaped by principles of justice. In such a world, bad things happen to good people as often as they happen to bad people. Events tend to be neither just nor unjust. Another is the unjust world, in which events are not random or meaningless but instead systematically oppose justice principles: Bad people enjoy good outcomes while good people suffer. Although the vast majority of people would prefer to live in a just world, it may be relatively difficult to choose between the other two worlds. An actively, perversely unjust world may even be easier to deal with than a random world, since nonrandom events are more meaningful and easier to predict and understand than random ones (Janoff-Bulman and Yopyk, 2004; Kay, Moscovitch, and Laurin, 2010).

Conspiracy theories clearly threaten the notion that the world is just, but, more specifically, they appear to resonate with the unjust, rather than the random world. They do this by positing that tragedies and disasters are not random, unforeseeable outcomes, but, rather, serve the interests of the unaccountable elites who orchestrate them. In a preliminary investigation of this idea (Sutton and Douglas, in preparation), we conducted a study in which participants were asked to complete a widely used scale of justice beliefs. This scale includes items that measure belief in an unjust world (e.g., "The political candidate who sticks up for his or her principles rarely gets elected"), and other items that tend to measure belief in a just world (e.g., "In almost any business or profession, people who do their job well rise to the top"). Participants were also asked to rate the extent to which they endorse a range of different conspiracy theories on the scale devised by Douglas and Sutton (2011). The results revealed a robust correlation between belief in conspiracy theories and the belief that the world is *unjust* (vs. not unjust). In contrast, beliefs in conspiracy theories were unrelated to beliefs that the world is just (vs. not just).

Although further work is required to discern the direction of causality, these findings suggest that conspiracy theories may be held together by the view that injustice reigns in the world – as opposed to the subtly different belief that justice is lacking. To return to Sunstein and Vermeule's (2009) analysis, the findings also suggest a different social-psychological mechanism by which conspiracy theories thrive among those living under

totalitarian regimes or in disadvantaged circumstances. Such circumstances expose people to chronic experience of injustice (Miller, 2001). Thus it may be necessary to address not only the limited information available to the disaffected but also the sociostructural bases of the disaffection itself.

Conspiracy theories: variable or variables?

We have seen that a range of situational and personality variables commonly predict conspiracy theories and so tend to bind them together. This is not surprising, since conspiracy theories imply that powerful elites are willing and able to conspire. This central belief in the existence of conspiracies may be the essential glue that holds beliefs in various conspiracy theories together (cf. Abalakina-Paap *et al.*, 1999; Wood *et al.*, 2012). Even more simply, it may be that items assessing beliefs in conspiracy theories tap different manifestations of this same, underlying belief. In other words, it may simply be that belief in conspiracy theories is a variable, which, like many others in social science, can be measured by self-report scales containing multiple items. In this view, all that the inter-correlations between conspiracy items show is that our measurements are reliable. These different conceptions of the relationship between conspiracy theories are diagrammatized in Figure 14.1.

As yet, the available data do not strongly favor one of these different conceptions of conspiracy theorizing over the other. They are not necessarily incompatible, either. Beliefs in conspiracy theories may well cohere partly because of their shared relationship with higher-order beliefs about authority, partly because of their common sensitivity to situational and personality factors, and partly because they are aspects of the same underlying variable.

This lack of clarity contributes to a certain disorder in the literature. For example, in some papers, researchers have assumed, *de facto*, that belief in conspiracy theories is a psychological variable proper, have measured it with scales assessing beliefs in various conspiracies, and have reported Cronbach's alpha as evidence that their measurement of the construct is robust (e.g., Douglas and Sutton, 2008, 2011). Other papers start with the assumption that specific conspiracy beliefs are not only distinct but also semantically opposed to each other. They then attempt to examine why conspiracy items are related to each other, putting aside any question that they might be items assessing the same variable (Wood *et al.*, 2012). In contrast, Abalakina-Paap *et al.* (1999) constructed a measure of "a general propensity to believe in conspiracy theories" (p. 640) that did not assess belief in any actual conspiracies. This

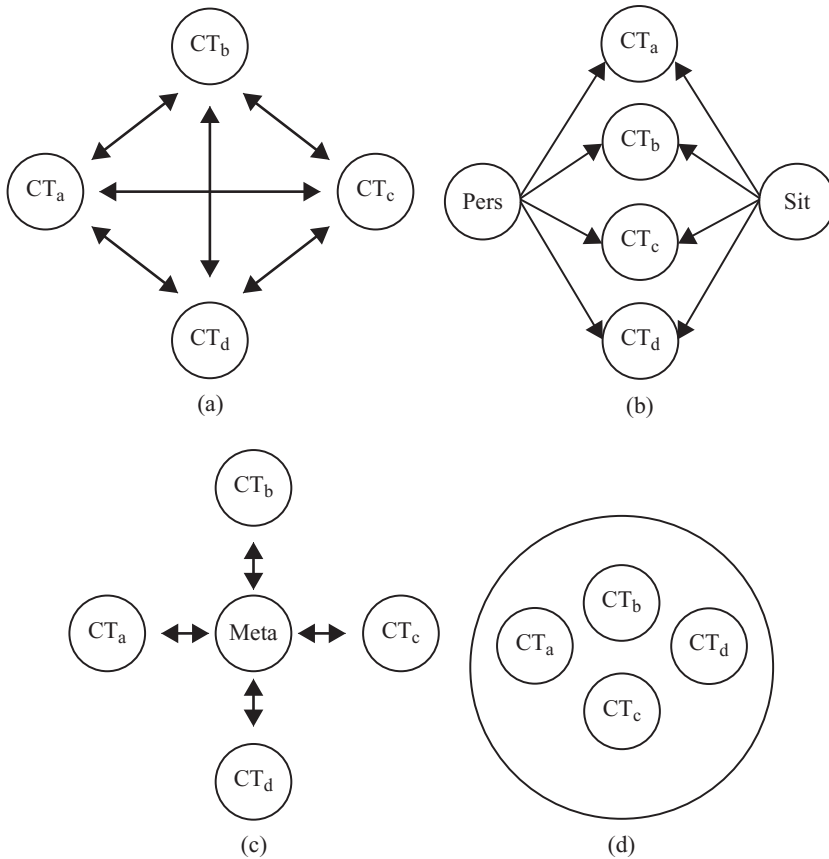


Figure 14.1 Four different conceptions of the relationships between conspiracy theories. (a) Straightforward monological relationship in which belief in each conspiracy theory (CT) supports belief in every other one. (b) Conspiracy theories may or may not have a causal relationship with each other, but are correlated because of their common susceptibility to the same personality (Pers) and situational (Sit) factors. (c) Conspiracy theories may or may not have a causal relationship with each other, and, indeed, may even be mutually antagonistic, but they are intercorrelated because they fuel, and are fueled by, a meta-belief in the deceitful nature of authorities. (d) Belief in each conspiracy theory is merely an exemplar of the same variable, conspiracy beliefs.

consisted instead of items such as, “People who see conspiracies behind everything are simply imagining things” (reverse-scored). Thus, they appear not to have been content to regard belief in a variety of conspiracy theories – also measured, in a separate scale – as evidence of a propensity to believe in them.

Assumptions about the nature of conspiracy theories vary widely not only between papers but also sometimes within the same paper. This is especially true of papers that have explicitly set out to test whether conspiracy theories comprise part of a monological belief system. In the important and stimulating papers by Swami and colleagues (Swami *et al.*, 2010, 2011, 2013), conspiracy theories are simultaneously treated in two different ways. First, items measuring belief in several conspiracy theories are aggregated to form a reliable scale of conspiracy beliefs – so treating the resultant scale as a variable. But, second, this variable is then related to belief in a new conspiracy theory (e.g., about the July 7, 2005 attacks in London), which is measured separately and treated as if it were an altogether separate variable conceptually. Thus, conspiracy-theory beliefs are being treated both as facets of the same unit, and as different units, within the same investigation. These papers implicitly ask readers to forget that they already know conspiracy theories A, B, and C are related, and then to be impressed by the fact that conspiracy D is related to them.

Note that we could do the same thing, in principle, with just about any attitude scale (e.g., attitudes to safe sex, abortion, or the environment). A correlation between an item taken out of this scale (or a new, analogous item) and the remainder of the scale would normally reflect nothing more than the fact that the items measure essentially the same attitude. Without independent evidence, there is no reason to assume that interitem correlations are driven by the motivated maintenance of a worldview, or willful ignorance of facts, or any other characteristic of a monological mind-set.

To be clear, many other interesting findings and ideas about psychological processes and individual differences emerge from all of these papers, which do not stand or fall on this single point. Also, it is interesting and important that beliefs in familiar conspiracy theories (e.g., about the deaths of John F. Kennedy and Princess Diana) are reliable predictors of willingness to accept conspiracy theories that the participant may not have encountered before, such as conspiracies about the allegedly malign forces behind the energy drink Red Bull (Swami *et al.*, 2011) or the disappearance of Amelia Earhart (Swami *et al.*, 2013). These findings show that, indeed, people who already believe in existing conspiracy theories will tend to be receptive to new conspiracy theories, exactly as

Goertzel (1994) suggested. This is an important finding, even if it does not show that conspiracy theorists have a monological mind-set.

We are unconcerned that the literature does not yet provide a definitive answer about which of the diagrammatized conceptions of conspiracy theories is most accurate. We can learn a lot from research that treats beliefs in various conspiracy theories as aspects of a single variable, such as the antecedents and consequences of belief and exposure to conspiracies generally. Likewise, we can learn a lot from research that examines how and why beliefs in individual conspiracy theories are interrelated. In other words, to examine different research questions, we can treat beliefs in various conspiracy theories as unique or as aggregates. This is reminiscent of the particle–wave duality in physics, in which much can be learned about electrons only if scientists treat them as if they were particles, and much else can be learned only if they are treated as waves. So long as each piece of research is informed by a consistent and more or less explicit conceptualization of conspiracy beliefs, there is no reason why the plurality of conceptualizations should hinder progress.

Closing comments

In this chapter, we have reviewed the claim that conspiracy theories form part of a monological mind-set. The evidence most commonly cited for this claim is that beliefs in diverse conspiracy theories are positively correlated (e.g., Goertzel, 1994; Swami *et al.*, 2010, 2011, 2013; Wood *et al.*, 2012). More recently, researchers have pointed to the fact that the strongest predictor of whether participants will accept a novel or unfamiliar conspiracy theory is the extent to which they already believe in other conspiracies (e.g., Swami *et al.*, 2011, 2013). However, we have argued that this evidence is not sufficient. There are other plausible mechanisms that hold conspiracy beliefs together, several of which have been empirically validated. For example, regardless of variations in content, these beliefs tend to appeal to individuals who believe the world to be an unjust place, and who have a strong need for control (Whitson and Galinsky, 2008), with more or less paranoid personality profiles (Swami *et al.*, 2010), or who think that they would personally engage in the alleged conspiracies (Douglas and Sutton, 2011). Further, an alternative and more parsimonious understanding of the positive relation between specific conspiracy beliefs is that they are all fed by a central distrust of authority, and may even be aspects of an underlying individual difference variable, such as “conspiracism.”

Against these alternative views, there is no evidence for the unique mechanisms associated with the monological mind-set. For example,

there is no evidence that conspiracy theorists are closed to experience, and no evidence that their thinking is nomothetic (abstract, general, and divorced from specifics). Another reason to be dissatisfied with the monological account of conspiracy theories, at least as it was originally stated, is that conspiracy theories are not necessarily mutually supportive. Indeed some are actually mutually incompatible (Wood *et al.*, 2012).

In sum, we think it is premature, and unfairly pejorative, to portray conspiracy beliefs as a manifestation of monological thinking. Closed-mindedness and willful ignorance of facts are stigmatized characteristics. It is sobering to reflect that scales measuring agreement with conspiracy theories also, by definition, measure disagreement with them. So we might equally say that correlations between conspiracy items show that *rejection* of conspiracy theories comprises part of a monological world-view, in which alternatives to official accounts are dismissed in a closed-minded and irrational fashion! We need stronger empirical and theoretical grounds that conspiracy theorists, rather than those who reject conspiracy theories, are more prone to monological thinking.

The pejorative implications of the monological perspective are unfortunate, in our view. Although there is evidence that conspiracy beliefs are sometimes underpinned by paranoia and irrationality, and that they have some harmful consequences, there is space for a more complimentary picture of conspiracy theories. They can be seen as creative, almost heroic efforts by ordinary people to question and to create alternatives to political orthodoxy (Sapountzis and Condor, 2013). They can be seen as products, and affirmations, of the democratic right to entertain minority views, no matter how absurd or unsettling they seem to the majority (cf. Swami *et al.*, 2011). Conspiracy theories more generally may allow people to question social hierarchies, causing governments to be more transparent and democratic (e.g., Clarke, 2002; Swami and Coles, 2010). We would advocate a dispassionate mode of scientific inquiry which is open to the possibility that these theories have conventionally desirable and undesirable consequences, and which is not unduly influenced by the cultural impulse to label them as simply “good” or “bad” (cf. Husting and Orr, 2007).

Despite our critique of the monological mind-set, we do think it makes some interesting predictions that deserve to be tested. One of the predictions of the monological position is that adherents (vs. skeptics) of conspiracy theories will invoke fewer concrete facts and more general patterns when explaining major events. This nomothetic explanatory style should also be apparent in more abstract, as opposed to concrete, language (Douglas and Sutton, 2003; Semin and Fiedler, 1988). Another

prediction of the monological view is that conspiracy adherents (vs. skeptics) will be relatively unmoved by the presentation of specific facts about the immediate causal background of an event. Research might therefore pretest adherence to conspiracy theories, and examine whether this moderates the extent to which participants are influenced by evidence that specific conspiracy theories are true or false (cf. Swami *et al.*, 2013). These are just two examples of the interesting lines of research that remain to be done on conspiracy beliefs.

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15 The role of paranoia in a dual-process motivational model of conspiracy belief

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“Even paranoids have enemies.” So (reportedly) said the fourth Israeli prime minister, Golda Meir, to Henry Kissinger during the 1973 Sinai talks. The point is, of course, that while paranoia is typically considered to describe a pathological disjunction between persecutory belief and reality, this is not *necessarily* so. There are numerous historical and contemporary examples of situations in which one group of people *really* are out to get others (for example, the McCarthyist persecution of supposed communist sympathizers in the 1950s, and numerous pogroms).

Indeed, this is a point repeatedly made about conspiracy by laypeople, often in defense of their belief in conspiracy, and scholars, often in defense of their thesis concerning conspiracy belief (see Coady, 2006). Under some circumstances, there *really* has been a conspiracy going on behind the conspiracy theory.

Our aim in this chapter is not to discuss whether or not paranoia or conspiracy belief is legitimate or rational (there are clearly cases where it may be), but rather to investigate why some people endorse conspiracy theories more than others. Specifically, we shall do this through consideration of several important individual difference variables that have been implicated as the foundation of a range of social and political attitudes and behaviors – social dominance orientation (SDO) (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999) and right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) (Altemeyer, 1981, 1996) – that together comprise a particularly powerful explanatory package (Altemeyer, 1998; Duckitt, 2001; McFarland and Adelson, 1996). At the same time, we shall attempt to illustrate the role that paranoia might play in the process.

Psychology and conspiracy belief

But first, let us consider conspiracy belief. If there is one thing that unites those few researchers interested in the psychological factors

Wilson (2007) reported the data that are described as sample 1, and Wilson (under review) the data that are described as sample 5.

associated with belief in conspiracies, it is their oft-expressed surprise that conspiracy thinking has not received more attention from psychological researchers (Graumann, 1987). First, conspiracy belief shares much in common with other, more routine disciplinary foci. For example, and at a more psychologically fundamental level, conspiracy theories are attributional phenomena concerning the potential causes of particularly significant events. Yet, there is very little published research evaluating the attributional processes underlying conspiracy thinking (but see Leman and Cinirella, 2007; Zonis and Joseph, 1994). Leman and Cinirella (2007), for example, have shown that events with greater or more dramatic outcomes (assassination of a politician compared with attempted assassination) are more likely to result in conspiracy attributions. At the level of similarity of issue content, there is a much more extensive literature on the frequency and psychological correlates of belief in paranormal phenomena (see Irwin, 2009 for a comprehensive review). Darwin, Neave, and Holmes (2011) and Wilson (2007) have shown that conspiracy belief correlates with belief in paranormal phenomena and measures of schizotypal personality.

Second, one can easily make an argument for the importance of studying these phenomena because of the significant impact they have on people's lives, either because some conspiracy theories are actually veridical (e.g., US foreknowledge of the attack on Pearl Harbor) or because belief in conspiracy theory can influence important behavior. For example, the relatively low acceptance of safe sex practices among African-Americans has been associated with the fairly widespread belief among this population that the HIV/AIDS virus was deliberately designed to target African-Americans (Bird and Bogart, 2003; Bogart and Thorburn, 2006; Crocker, Luhtanen, Broadnax *et al.*, 1999). Finally, since the events of September 11, 2001, there has anecdotally been an increase in the popularity of conspiracy theories, and not just concerning 9/11. Rather than autopsy reasons why we, as psychological researchers, have paid less attention to some issues than others, this chapter is intended to represent a concerted attempt to understand conspiracy theorizing (CT), and extend the available literature on the topic.

It is appropriate to note that there have been detailed considerations of CT in other academic domains – for example, the more sociological analyses of Barkun (2003) and Hofstadter (1966), under the broad headings of cultural and political studies. The research presented here is, however, psychological – it focuses very much on the inside-the-head aspects of CT that differentiate it from more sociostructural analyses. An important contribution to the understanding of CT psychology was presented by Goertzel (1994), who surveyed a North American sample about belief in specific topical conspiracies, as well as brief measures of

several obvious relevant constructs (e.g., anomie, interpersonal trust). As well as illustrating relatively high levels of support for various theories, an overall scale based on aggregating beliefs about a range of theories was reliable (indicating that belief in one theory tends to be associated with others), suggesting that CT might reflect a worldview (as Zusne and Jones, 1989, have suggested for paranormal beliefs). CT was also correlated with anomie and lack of interpersonal trust, so that the more socially isolated and less trusting the respondent, the stronger was the belief in conspiracies. Minority groups also tended to report stronger beliefs. These findings support the hypothesis that CT might be most likely among the disenfranchised and disempowered in society. This is consistent with the speculation of Inglehart (1987) that those at the political and social extremes would be expected to attribute their lack of success and status to conspiracies against them, as they are unlikely to find themselves in situations where their beliefs and values influence social and political events directly.

More recently, Abalakina-Paap, Stephan, Craig *et al.* (1999) reported associations between conspiracy belief and anomie, distrust, powerlessness, and hostility, as well as finding again that minorities are more likely to endorse conspiracy theories. Swami and colleagues have detailed associations between political cynicism, rebelliousness, agreeableness, and belief in 9/11 conspiracies (Swami, Chamorro-Premuzic, and Furnham, 2009); between political cynicism, support for democracy, rebelliousness, lower self-esteem, agreeableness, and belief in 7/7 London bombing conspiracy (Swami, Coles, Stieger *et al.*, 2011); between lower self-esteem, higher agreeableness, political cynicism, ideological attitudes, and conspiracy belief about the disappearance of Amelia Earhart and Fred Noonan (Swami and Furnham, 2012); and between schizotypal personality, belief in extraterrestrial aliens, and belief in Moon landings conspiracy (Swami, Pietschnig, Tran *et al.*, 2013). If there is a theme across these papers assessing the individual difference correlates of conspiracy belief, it is that conspiracy theories are more positively endorsed by individuals reporting more political cynicism, distrust, anomie, paranormal belief, schizotypy, and minority status.

Given that CT frequently, if not always, involves a strong political element (see Inglehart, 1987, for a discussion of conspiratorial thinking particularly among minority/extremist political party supporters), it makes sense to consider conspiracy belief in the context of other sociopolitical constructs. Indeed, the consistent finding that political alienation and cynicism are predictive of conspiracy belief similarly justifies such a focus. To that end, we propose that conspiracy belief should also be associated with those variables that have been found to be important in other sociopolitical attitudes and behaviors, and specifically RWA and SDO

Motivational goals underlying individual differences in prejudice and sociopolitical behavior

RWA (Altemeyer, 1981, 1996) has a long track record, growing as it does from the seminal work of Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levenson *et al.* (1950) on the authoritarian personality. Adorno *et al.* described an extensive syndrome of characteristics that combine to produce a particularly unpleasant personality, which they used as a partial explanation for the atrocities of the Third Reich. In this process, they touched briefly on a “paranoid style” (a term later adopted by Hofstadter, 1966 in his oft-quoted essay on the conspiratorial aspects of American politics). Altemeyer (1981, 1996) conceives of RWA as a covariation of three attitudinal clusters – authoritarian submission (people should do as legitimate authorities tell them), authoritarian aggression (people who do not do as they are told should be punished), and conventionalism (adherence to traditional social norms). RWA is also a potent predictor of prejudice and other sociopolitical attitudes.

A relatively newer research tool, SDO is an individual-difference construct indexing the extent to which individuals endorse group-based hierarchies with some groups at the top and other groups arrayed below them (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). SDO is an important tool for testing predictions based on social-dominance theory (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999), which argues that postindustrial societies are organized as group-based hierarchies, supported by a range of psychological mechanisms that perpetuate a social and economic hierarchy. SDO is a consistent predictor of prejudice of various kinds (Altemeyer, 1998; McFarland and Adelson, 1996; Sibley, Robertson, and Wilson, 2006), as well as various social and political attitudes.

Additionally, as initially illustrated by McFarland and Adelson (1996), while RWA and SDO are typically correlated (McFarland and Adelson, 1996; Roccato and Ricolfi, 2005), their combination explains as much as half of the variation in measures of prejudice through their unique and shared contributions – and in some cases their interaction (Wilson and Sibley, 2013). Duckitt (2001; Duckitt and Sibley, 2010) has proposed a dual-process motivational model of prejudice in which individual differences in prejudice result from two motivational goals, dominance and superiority versus egalitarianism (as reflected in SDO), and social cohesion and security versus autonomy and independence (RWA). In this model, social dominance and authoritarianism depend upon one’s beliefs about the extent to which the world is a competitive (in the case of SDO) or dangerous (in the case of RWA) place. Both SDO and RWA, then, are “triggered” by threats to hierarchy or security. Indeed, we know

that priming people to perceive a dangerous world increases RWA scores (Duckitt and Fisher, 2003), and shifts in dominance hierarchies are associated with changes in SDO (Huang and Liu, 2005). These worldviews, in turn, reflect sociostructural characteristics and relatively stable individual differences in personality. In its power to account for variation in a range of sociopolitical attitudes, the dual-process model provides a powerful and coherent tool for understanding a variety of social and political attitudes.

SDO, RWA, and conspiracy

On the face of it, it seems reasonable to suspect that RWA and SDO should predict conspiracy belief, though perhaps differentially, depending on the content of the particular conspiracy. For instance, high SDOs should be concerned about the threat to social hierarchies of improving the status of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities. Similarly, high RWAs will see attempts to subvert tradition, such as promoting gay marriage, as threatening social cohesion and security. Given that threats to social hierarchy also potentially destabilize social cohesion and security, many conspiracies would be expected to trigger both SDO and RWA through increasing competition and danger.

Psychological research into conspiracy belief is sufficiently new that there has been little empirical work looking at the role of sociopolitical individual differences such as RWA and SDO. Abalakina-Paap *et al.* (1999) reported that belief in specific conspiracies is correlated with RWA, but not with belief in general conspiracy (that conspiracies do happen). Swami (2012) investigated endorsement of Jewish conspiracy themes among Malays, and found belief in such conspiracies to be strongly correlated with modern racism. Unsurprisingly, given the theoretical and empirical links between prejudice, SDO, and RWA, endorsement of Jewish conspiracy is also correlated with SDO and RWA. Swami and colleagues (Swami *et al.*, 2009, 2011) have reported the Big Five characteristic of agreeableness to be negatively correlated with conspiracy belief, as is SDO (see Sibley and Duckitt, 2008).

Psychopathology, paranoia, and conspiracy belief

Given the political focus of many conspiracy theories, greater focus on the roles of RWA and SDO is understandable when one considers that variables such as political cynicism and trust have been consistently linked to conspiracy belief. What is perhaps more surprising is the very real dearth of research that has investigated the psychopathological correlates

of conspiracy belief. While schizotypy (and particularly the extent to which people display “magical thinking” or make unusual connections between unrelated events) has been linked to conspiracy belief (Darwin *et al.*, 2011; Wilson, 2007), few researchers appear to have empirically investigated paranoia – arguably the core attribute associated with the stereotype of the conspiracy theorist. Such a link has been theorized (e.g., Wulff, 1987), and Darwin *et al.* (2011) report that scores on the Conspiracy Theory Questionnaire (Bruder and Manstead, 2009, cited by Darwin *et al.*, 2011) correlated .47 with scores on the Paranoid Ideation Scale (Fenigstein and Vanable, 1992), while Wilson (2007) reported weak (but consistent) significant correlations around .20 between conspiracy belief and scores on the Paranoia Checklist (Freeman, Garety, Bebbington *et al.*, 2005).

A staple of popular representations of conspiracy, paranoia refers to persecutory delusions – the belief that people (be they friends, family, or strangers) are watchings, or intend to harm, the protagonist (Freeman *et al.*, 2005). At its most basic, being paranoid means having thoughts about malicious others. Freeman *et al.* (2005) operationalize paranoia as a multidimensional construct comprising frequency of paranoid ideation, the degree of distress associated with the ideation, and the extent to which the subject believes that the “delusion” is true. In a review of the literature considering persecutory delusions, Freeman (2007) suggests that some degree of paranoia is as common as anxiety among the general population, and that anxiety, depression, and poor self-esteem are among the affective correlates of persecutory delusions.

Accounting for paranoia in a dual-process motivational model of conspiracy belief

While there is now a significant amount of research that has built upon Duckitt’s (2001) original dual-process model, and it has been applied to understanding a range of prejudices and social attitudes, it is less clear how psychopathological constructs like paranoia fit in, or whether we should even ask the question.

There has been only a limited focus on the psychopathological correlates of SDO and RWA, and many of the studies that report associations do so incidentally, and tend to be limited to mood-related variables. For example, while van Hiel and de Clercq (2009) suggested that RWA might protect against the risk of depression, Duriez, Klimstra, Luyckx *et al.* (2012) have reported that while RWA was unrelated to depression at time 1 in a longitudinal sample, time 1 RWA weakly predicted time 2 depression, leading them to conclude that RWA is a risk factor for depression.

Recently (and comprehensively), Onraet, van Hiel, Dhont *et al.* (2013) report analysis of various studies that have included SDO, RWA, and a range of psychopathological correlates. SDO showed weak significant relationships with trait anxiety, while RWA was associated weakly with death anxiety. Both were associated moderately with intergroup anxiety.

Most relevant to this discussion, Walter, Thorpe, and Kingery (2001) found that the higher their participants scored on RWA (but not SDO), the more prone they were to demonstrating “irrational” beliefs – that the past is important for determining the present, the importance of others’ approval, and the need to be perfect, though it might be argued that these are qualitatively different from the kinds of persecutory beliefs more typically associated with pathological delusions. At the same time, high SDOs were more likely to report feelings of suspicion and concern, while high RWAs reported more general feelings of anxiety.

In the absence of strong guidance, there are several ways that paranoia might “fit” into a dual-process model. Paranoia may mediate between dangerous/competitive worldviews and RWA/SDO, and between RWA/SDO and conspiracy belief, or paranoia may predict RWA/SDO and/or dangerous/competitive worldviews. Onraet *et al.* (2013) found both RWA and SDO to be associated with intergroup anxiety, and it might therefore be reasonable to suggest that paranoia contributes to both SDO and RWA, via concern over the malicious intent of others. Given that Walter *et al.* (2001) report SDO to be correlated with feelings of suspicion, it may be that paranoia is related particularly to SDO rather than RWA.

Data

The conspiracy-belief measure used in these studies is based on principal-components analysis of examples of conspiracy theories derived from a range of sources (including the internet and popular books about conspiracy theory). The full process has been described elsewhere (Wilson, 2007), and analyses indicated four broad “themes” of conspiracy:

- (1) organizational conspiracies targeting particular groups (e.g., “HIV was developed in a laboratory specifically to target minorities,” “World governments are run by the Illuminati,” “A secret cabal of elite individuals controls world politics” – 11 items, α (Cronbach’s α) = .89);
- (2) US government conspiracies (e.g., “The US government knew about or planned the attacks on the Twin Towers on 9/11,” “The Iraq War of 2003 was about oil, and not democracy,” “George W. Bush rigged the 2000 and 2004 American elections,” – 5 items, α = .87);

- (3) extraterrestrial alien conspiracies (e.g., “World governments have suppressed evidence of alien visits,” “The US military is hiding alien technology in Area 51,” “World governments are complicit in the abduction by aliens of thousands, if not millions, of people” – 5 items, $\alpha = .79$);
- (4) New Zealand-related conspiracies (e.g., “The All Blacks rugby team was deliberately poisoned prior to the 1995 World Cup Final,” “The *Rainbow Warrior* was bombed by agents of a foreign power,” “New Zealand society is constantly manipulated by big business” – 4 items, $\alpha = .50$).

Combining items from the first three components produces a highly reliable scale assessing the extent to which people believe these specific conspiracies are likely to be accurate descriptions of the events they pertain to.

Paranoia and conspiracy belief: analysis and discussion

Here we summarize the results of four survey-based studies investigating the relationship between self-reported paranoia and conspiracy belief. In our studies, paranoia has been assessed in one of two ways. The first uses the British Inventory of Mental Pathology (BIMP) (Bedford and Deary, 2006), a 36-item scale assessing a broad range of psychopathological symptoms. There are six 6-item subscales, including one assessing paranoid belief (for example, one item is as follows: “Recently, I have felt that an organization or group has been planning my downfall”). The second is the Paranoia Checklist developed by Freeman *et al.* (2005) and adapted from Fenigstein and Venable’s (1992) Paranoia Scale. The measure invites participants to indicate how frequent, how distressing, and how veridical (how true) they think a range of scenarios are (for example, “I am under threat from others”).

Table 15.1 provides correlations between conspiracy-belief scores and measures of paranoia, based on analysis of four student subject pool samples (sample 1, $n = 222$, collected in October 2006 and reported by Wilson (2007), sample 2, $n = 81$, collected in October 2006, sample 3, $n = 228$, collected in July 2008, and sample 4, $n = 180$, collected in September 2009). The participants were invited to take part in surveys of “social and political attitudes” and received credit towards a mandatory course research requirement. All samples completed Freeman *et al.*’s (2005) Paranoia Checklist. Sample 1 completed only the frequency subscale, and sample 2 also completed the BIMP, which includes a subscale assessing paranoid belief. Sample 4 did not complete the full conspiracy scale, but rather an 8-item short version.

Table 15.1 *Correlations between paranoia and conspiracy belief across four student samples*

	Sample			
	1	2	3	4
<i>n</i>	219	81	222	177
<i>Paranoia Checklist</i>				
Frequency	.27**	.27*	.29**	.30**
Distress		.32**	.27**	.28**
Truth		.21 [†]	.30**	.19*
<i>BIMP Paranoid Belief</i>		.25*		
Conspiracy scale reliability	.91	.91	.90	.78

[†] $p < .10$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

In short, all but one of the paranoia measures correlated positively, though modestly, with conspiracy belief. These correlations are generally weaker than those reported by Darwin *et al.* (2011), and it is unclear why this was the case. The measure of conspiracy belief used by Darwin *et al.* (2011) is similar in delivery (inviting participants to indicate the likelihood that each of thirty-eight conspiracies is likely or unlikely) and Fenigstein and Vanable's (1992) Paranoia Scale is the basis for Freeman *et al.*'s (2005) Paranoia Checklist (Freeman *et al.* argue that the Paranoia Scale is not sufficiently persecutory).

Nevertheless, it is probably fair to conclude that while paranoid ideation clearly is consistently associated with conspiracy belief, that association does not appear strong enough to justify arguing that conspiracy belief is the same thing as paranoia.

Bringing together paranoia, conspiracy, and the dual-process model: analysis and discussion

So, how does paranoia fit into a dual-process model of conspiracy belief? Next we describe a study, once again using 180 university subject-pool participants (sample 5) invited to participate in a "survey of social and political attitudes." The participants completed the full conspiracy-belief scale; the BIMP; the 16-item SDO-6 scale (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999 – sample item, "Inferior groups should stay in their place"); the 30-item RWA scale (Altemeyer, 1996 – sample item, "What our country *really* needs, instead of more 'civil rights,' is a good stiff dose of law and

Table 15.2 *Correlations between BIMP psychopathology subscale scores, conspiracy belief, RWA, SDO, and Worldview scale scores*

BIMP subscale	Euphoric mood	Grandiose belief	Intrusive thoughts	Paranoid belief	Psychological distress	Somatic distress	SDO	RWA
Conspiracy belief	.19*	.40**	.26**	.34**	.18*	.26**	.45**	.38**
SDO	.09	.37**	.20*	.44**	.22**	.25**	–	–
RWA	–.01	.30**	.03	.30**	.01	.04	.45**	–
Dangerous World	.08	.11	.09	.09	.21*	.17*	.12	.34**
Competitive World	.13	.27**	.19*	.37**	.15	.23**	.59**	.35**

order.”); and the Dangerous and Competitive Worldview scales (Duckitt, 2001 – sample Dangerous World item, “Despite what one hears about ‘crime in the streets,’ there probably isn’t any more now than there ever has been” – sample Competitive World item, “Winning is not the first thing: It’s the *only* thing”). The SDO, RWA, conspiracy-belief, and worldview scales were all answered on a 7-point scale, and mean scores were calculated for all scales (Table 15.2). All scales and subscales proved reliable.

Scores on RWA ($M = 3.08$, $SD = .91$) and SDO ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.05$) were characteristically low. On average, the samples tended to think the conspiracies presented to be unlikely (organizational conspiracy, $M = 2.72$, $SD = 1.17$; US government conspiracy, $M = 3.78$, $SD = 1.32$; alien conspiracy, $M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.29$; overall conspiracy belief, $M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.09$). All conspiracy scale scores were significantly less than the theoretical scale midpoint of 4: $t(156) < -2.07$, $p < .04$, though the difference for US government conspiracy belief was close to being nonsignificant ($p = .04$).

Conspiracy belief showed significant correlations with all six BIMP subscales, with Grandiose Belief and Paranoid Belief demonstrating the strongest associations. Intriguingly, these were also the only two BIMP subscales that correlated with both SDO and RWA – the more social dominant and authoritarian the participants, the more paranoid and grandiose ideation they endorsed. That SDO correlated (albeit weakly) with five of the six BIMP subscales is particularly interesting in light of Sidanius and Pratto’s (1999) theoretical endorsement of SDO as being a “normal” part of contemporary social life. By this, they clearly do not mean that SDO should be unrelated to psychological distress, but rather that SDO does not grow from a psychopathological foundation. These

results suggest that a tendency to social dominance may carry other psychological baggage. Contrary to expectation, RWA was unrelated to the subscale Intrusive Thoughts – an index of worry and anxiety where we might have expected that our threat-sensitive authoritarians would endorse more worry than others.

Conspiracy belief correlated significantly with both RWA and (more strongly) SDO. However, Wilson and Sibley (2013) have shown that SDO and RWA interact to predict political ideology. That is to say, the interaction between the two accounts for significant variation in ideology (variously measured) on top of the variation they account for individually (Aiken and West, 1991). In order to assess whether SDO and RWA interact to predict conspiracy belief, an interaction term was computed by multiplying SDO with RWA scores for each participant. Conspiracy belief subscale scores were then regressed onto SDO and RWA (as a block) followed by the SDO by RWA interaction term. A significant interaction (moderation) is observed if the interaction term explains significant additional variance.

There was no evidence for moderation in predicting either US government conspiracies or alien conspiracies. The inclusion of the interaction term accounted for significant variance in organizational conspiracy belief (e.g., HIV manufactured to target minorities, etc.): $F_{\text{STEP 1}}(2, 149) = 33.28, p < .001, R^2_{\text{ADJ}} = .31$; $F_{\text{STEP 2}}(3, 148) = 23.93, p < .001, R^2_{\text{ADJ}} = .33$; $\Delta F(1, 148) = 3.95, p < .05, \Delta R^2_{\text{ADJ}} = .02$). In order to clarify the nature of the moderation, ModGraph (Jose, 2004) was used to plot the interaction. Figure 15.1 shows the result, indicating that at low levels of RWA, as SDO increases so too does conspiracy belief, and at high levels of RWA, this is even more pronounced – people report the highest levels of endorsement of these organizational conspiracies if they are high on both RWA and SDO, and the lowest endorsement when they score low on both. It is likely that these “double-highs” (Altemeyer, 2004) are particularly sensitive to threats to not only social hierarchy but also social convention and security, and this accounts for their weaker opposition to conspiracy belief associated with shady organizations trying to do wrong to people. We note “weaker opposition” because even though double-highs reported the highest scores, these high scores were still below the theoretical midpoint of the scale.

Finally, in order to test a dual-process model of conspiracy belief, the data were subjected to structural equation modelling, using SPSS Amos. Worldviews, SDO, RWA, conspiracy belief, and Paranoid Belief were treated as observed variables. The basic dual-process model (Dangerous World predicting RWA, Competitive World predicting SDO, and SDO and RWA predicting conspiracy belief) fit the data satisfactorily. The path

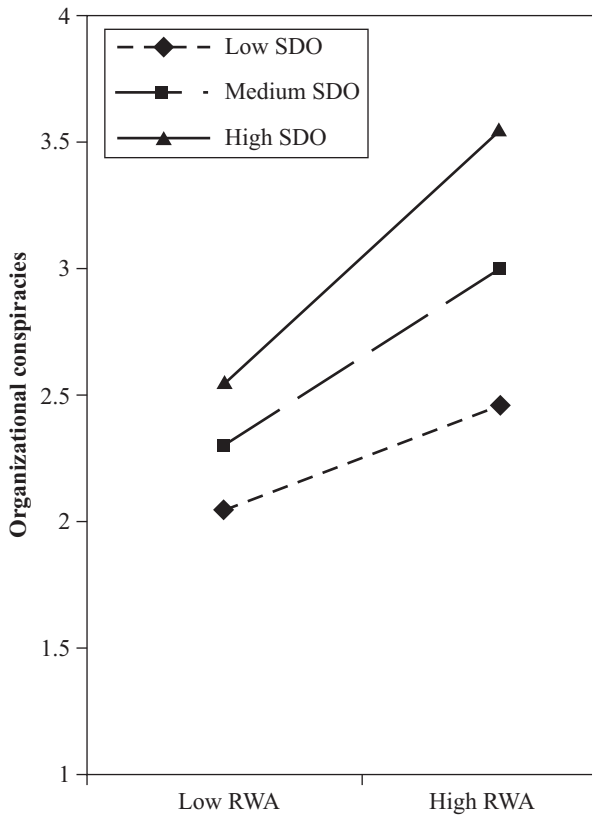


Figure 15.1 ModGraph plot of the SDO by RWA interaction predicting endorsement of organizational conspiracies.

from SDO to RWA (but not vice versa) was significant, consistent with several previous analyses.

Paranoid Belief was included in the model in a variety of positions. Analyses did not support a role for Paranoid Belief as a mediator between any other variables in the model. However, Paranoid Belief was successfully included as a significant predictor of both Competitive World beliefs and SDO. Paranoid Belief was not a significant predictor of RWA or Dangerous World belief. [Figure 15.2](#) shows the final path model.

This analysis shows that the dual-process motivational model proposed by Duckitt (2001) to explain intergroup attitudes predicts almost a quarter of the variation in conspiracy belief. Both the Dangerous World/RWA and Competitive World/SDO pathways of the model predict unique

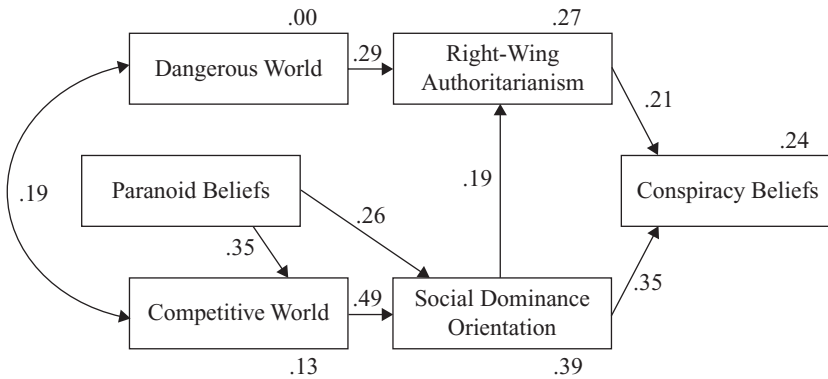


Figure 15.2 Path analysis of a dual-process model, including paranoia, predicting conspiracy belief: $\chi^2(7) = 13.36$ ns, $\chi^2/df = 1.91$, GFI = .96, RMSEA = .04, all paths significant at least at $p < .05$.

variance in conspiracy belief, and RWA also appears to mediate between SDO and conspiracy belief – a preference for group-based hierarchy is associated with elevated authoritarianism that in turn predicts conspiracy belief. While bearing in mind the limits of cross-sectional data, this analysis suggests that conspiracy belief may be (at least in part) the consequence of greater preference for hierarchy and/or authority that in turn stems from concerns that the world is a dangerous and/or competitive place.

That Paranoid Belief fits into this picture through prediction of the Competitive World/SDO path of the model is consistent with the work of Walter *et al.* (2001), who found that suspicion was more consistent with SDO than RWA. But why is this the case? After all, we know that authoritarians are highly sensitive to threats to security and cohesion (Duckitt and Fisher, 2003, among others) so why is this not manifested in some degree of paranoia over such threats, when RWA does predict actual belief in these kinds of threats as they are embodied by conspiracy? We would suggest that the answer to this may lie in the difference between paranoia and conspiracy belief. Paranoia refers to persecutory beliefs about threats to oneself as an individual, while conspiracies refer to the malicious intent of mysterious others to the detriment of groups of individuals. To paraphrase David Coady (2008), if I believe that people are deliberately trying to prevent me from publishing my research, that is paranoia, not conspiracy, because the malicious action targets only me. Research like that conducted by Duckitt and Fisher (2003) typically involves group-based threat, even if only by implication, while the

items of Fenigstein and Venable's (1992) Paranoia Scale and Freeman *et al.*'s (2005) Paranoia Checklist explicitly ask about malicious intent and action towards the respondent in particular.

The next interesting question concerns why SDO, also a group-referential construct, is predicted by Paranoid Belief? One possibility is that high SDOs are concerned about threats to both individual and group hierarchy – that a threat to one's own position is a threat to the position of one's group. Several authors have noted that SDO, but not RWA, is associated strongly with psychopathy – which one can think of as individual dominance (e.g., Hodson, Hogg, and MacInnis, 2009; Wilson, 2005; Wilson and Sibley, 2012). Maybe, as far as SDO goes, what threatens or benefits me specifically threatens or benefits my group status in a way that does not apply to RWA.

Concluding remarks

To summarize, the results presented here show that conspiracy belief is correlated with paranoid ideation (assessed by two different measures) but, though robust, the relationship is by no means large enough to suggest that paranoia is the defining correlate of conspiracy belief. At the same time, both RWA and SDO, themselves important constructs for understanding numerous social and political attitudes, appear to be modestly associated with paranoid ideation.

Conspiracy belief was also correlated with Grandiose Belief. This suggests that the more one endorses conspiracy, the more self-important one appears to be. This is consistent with the suggestion by Billig (1987) that proponents of conspiracy theory typically present themselves as “special” in that they have not succumbed to the official story, and have an important role in exposing conspiracy. In fact, conspiracy belief was at least weakly correlated with all domains of symptomology assessed by the BIMP – either believing in conspiracies predisposes one to psychological ill-being, or, alternatively, psychopathology lays a foundation for conspiracy belief. Disentangling these two possibilities will necessitate cunning research designs, perhaps assessing psychopathology and conspiracy belief over time in order to assess causality over time. We believe that, to date, this is the first examination of a broad range of psychopathological symptoms in relation to conspiracy theory.

The finding that paranoia is associated with RWA and SDO is probably unsurprising given the numerous historical examples of conservative/rightist policy and practice focused on identifying threats to societal order (for example, the “Reds under the bed” propaganda of the National Party prime minister Robert Muldoon in 1970s New Zealand,

and justification of voter-identification laws by Republicans in the 2012 US elections). That conspiracy belief appears to be associated with RWA and SDO ($r = .45$ and $.38$ respectively in sample 5) makes sense given that many conspiracies have strongly political content, and SDO and RWA are probably a big part of the foundation of political attitudes.

At the same time, it is an open question as to whether or not conspiracy belief might be the exclusive domain of conservative/rightist elites and voters – pogroms and persecution are very definitely not the sole preserve of the right. We suspect that the appropriate operationalization of conspiracy belief in research is vital for addressing this question. For instance, it would be unsurprising to find that in many Western nations, right-wing sympathizers endorse the belief that there are conspiracies deliberately intended to privilege minorities (such as homosexuals, indigenous peoples, women, and immigrants) over “legitimate” citizens. At the same time, liberals/leftists might also believe in a powerful lobby focused on disadvantaging exactly those same groups. Failure to broadly define conspiracy might result in research findings allowing characterization of conspiracy belief as something related only to the right (or the left, depending). Indeed, the stereotypical conspiracy theorist might even endorse both sets of claims.

Following from this point, it is likely that the nature of the political context may be important for who exactly is seen as a conspiracy theorist. That is to say, those who run the country determine whose “official story” is told and, in turn, who is to be distrusted. Once again, only research over time in the same contexts will help us to understand the particular dynamics of conspiracy as political fortunes wax and wane.

Just as support for the original dual-process model suggests that contextual factors that lead to increased perceptions of danger or competition will have flow-on effects resulting in increased out-group negativity (see Sibley, Wilson, and Duckitt, 2007), so too do these results suggest that, at times when the world appears more dangerous or competitive, we might expect increases in conspiracy belief. This is entirely consistent with the anecdotal increase in popularity of conspiracy theory after 9/11 – a supremely salient threat to security and social cohesion, and threat to the status of the West. Indeed, given that events like 9/11 are so salient, so major, it is unsurprising that they become the subject of conspiracy theory.

What have we learnt? Unsurprisingly, there is a kernel of truth to the stereotype of the paranoid conspiracy theorist, though perhaps not as large a kernel as the stereotype suggests. Additionally, and importantly, conspiracy belief can be tied into a broader research tradition aimed at understanding people’s social and political attitudes. That conspiracy

belief fits into Duckitt's (2001) dual-process model is potentially useful for understanding how social and political threats lay the foundation for shifts in the popularity of conspiracy belief.

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16 Searching for the root of all evil: an existential-sociological perspective on political enemyship and scapegoating

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Political enemyship is common and diverse, ranging from the scapegoating of minority parties by dominant ones to conspiracy theories about the alleged power of one individual to control wide swaths of society. Many social scientists have argued that enemy figures and out-groups play an essential role in the construction and defense of political identities. We propose that to understand why this is the case, we should first analyze the diverse psychological functions that enemies serve at the individual level.

To this end, we begin this chapter by summarizing a theory that explains how perceived relations of enmity in both personal and political arenas allow individuals to maintain a sense of having personal control and a valued identity – beliefs that ultimately serve to buffer threatening thoughts about personal mortality. We then review evidence from the social-psychological literature supporting this existential theory. In the second half of the chapter, we turn from the question of the functions that enemyship serves to the question of when (i.e., under what socio-historical circumstances) enemyship is most likely to be employed for those functions. Drawing on insights from sociology, we propose several hypotheses concerning both quantitative and qualitative variation in enemyship processes. We believe that our integrative existential-sociological framework has considerable potential to explain why political enemyship and scapegoating take place, and to predict when these phenomena can be expected with reasonable certainty.

Enemyship and politics

A number of psychologists (e.g., Allport, 1954; Cantril, 1941) have argued that clear enemy groups are necessary to solidify political group identities (for review, see Holt and Silverstein, 1989). This work is based on variations of the social identity theory (Tajfel, 2010/1978)

hypothesis that group members strive for valued group distinctiveness, and perhaps the best way to do so is by differentiating the group from devalued out-groups. Thus, defining group characteristics over and against those of an enemy group is often a crucial process in the consolidation of political beliefs and identity.

Indeed, in the most radical statement of this position, the political theorist Carl Schmitt (2007/1932) argued that the very essence of politics as a unique domain of human activity inhered in the *friend–enemy* relationship. For Schmitt, politics could only be distinguished from other important sociocultural domains – such as aesthetics and religion – by recognizing the defense of one's position against that of an enemy as the starting point for all political thought and action. Schmitt went further to claim that politics (as grounded in the friend–enemy relationship) uniquely affords individuals the opportunity to satisfy *existential* motives. For Schmitt, existential motivation meant being willing to kill or be killed in service of an idea (see also Marcuse, 2009/1968).

We do not straightforwardly endorse Schmitt's narrow definitions of politics or existential motivation. But conceptual issues aside, the historical record clearly supports his key notion – namely, that political friend–enemy relations have immense power to drive individuals to extreme acts, including murder and martyrdom. This reality raises the question of how exactly collective political constructions offer individuals an opportunity to satisfy their personal existential motivations. Specifically, how do political processes, largely occurring outside the purview of a given individual, give rise to such deep-seated personal convictions? Moreover, under which circumstances will individuals be most likely to satisfy their existential motives through the friend–enemy relationship?

We propose that underneath these questions lies the issue of why enemyship is so important for the construction of identity and the maintenance of belief systems. Two characteristics of enemyship in particular call out for explanation: first, it is *irrational* – marked by fervor and superstition and capable of fomenting extreme antisocial actions with little regard for sound judgment; second, it *assumes various forms* – its object, scope, and duration differing significantly between groups and sociohistorical circumstances. To be sure, a sociological perspective emphasizing historically situated struggles for resources could explain much of the second aspect of enemyship, and indeed we will adopt a largely sociological approach later in this chapter. However, we believe that a framework emphasizing existential motives to establish a valued identity in the face of mortality is better suited than other perspectives to explain the more irrational aspect of enemyship. Therefore, to understand this fundamental issue, we first need to examine the human existential situation, and the

existential functions of personal enemyship. Therein, we propose, lie the psychological roots of political enemyship.

An existential theory of (political) enemyship

An existential theory of enemyship should be rooted in that which is both the ultimate existential concern and the ultimate threat posed by an enemy: death (Hoffman, 1983; Tillich, 1952). Within social psychology, the most widely researched theory of the role of death awareness in human behavior is terror management theory (TMT) (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, and Solomon, 2003). According to the theory, people's knowledge of their impending death compels the construction and defense of cultural ideologies that guarantee immortality (such as political ideologies), and striving for lasting personal value within these cultural frameworks.

More than 400 studies carried out in over a dozen countries have produced findings in accord with hypotheses derived from TMT (for a review, see Greenberg, Solomon, and Arndt, 2008). Many of these studies test the *mortality salience* hypothesis: If cultural worldviews and self-esteem provide us with a sense of immortality, then making people's mortality salient should lead people to bolster and defend their cultural worldviews (i.e., *worldview defense*) and to strive more at tasks that provide them self-esteem. Studies show, for example, that participants who write a few sentences about their death (compared to another topic) are more favorable to people who validate their worldview (e.g., their nationality and religious beliefs) and are more disparaging of people who criticize it (Greenberg *et al.*, 2008). Importantly, however, participants in these studies are not consciously aware that thoughts of death are driving their defensive behaviors.

Accordingly, over eighty studies have also shown support for the *death thought accessibility* hypothesis – namely, that threatening the constructs people rely on for symbolic immortality will increase the extent to which cognitions about death are accessible outside immediate consciousness. In many of these studies, presenting people with information threatening aspects of their worldview or self-esteem elevates the accessibility of death-related thought, but not of other negative cognitions, suggesting that investment in these constructs serves to ameliorate concerns with mortality in particular (see Hayes, Schimel, Arndt *et al.*, 2010, for a review).

The need to deny death is thus at least partly responsible for people's pursuit and creation of symbolic meaning and self-esteem. Without the constant threat of death – the promised event forming the outer limit of our identities – humans would not be driven to construct personal and

political identities with the same fervor. Yet how do people conceptualize the threat of death in their everyday lives? Even if belief in the transcendence of a political or religious group affords people the conviction that they are persons of worth destined for immortality, they are still forced at times to contemplate death, as when they are faced by natural disasters or the loss of loved ones. TMT suggests that focused awareness of the reality that death is ultimately inevitable and could come at any moment from a variety of unpredictable environmental sources is psychologically untenable. In order to avoid preoccupation with such a disturbing conceptualization of death, people must find some other interpretation of the dangers lurking in their environment.

The existential anthropologists Ernest Becker (1969) and Mary Douglas (1966) propose that personal enemyship is one defense on which people often rely to cope with the awareness of the myriad hazards threatening them with destruction. Personal enemyship is the perception that another person or persons are using power and influence to undermine one's goals and well-being. By tracing all potential sources of threat back to a focal enemy who can be monitored, one gains a sense of control and some mastery over the problem of impending death.

Yet, as Becker (1969) argued, perceived enemies do not only augment the individual's sense of personal control in a world of random sources of potentially lethal hazard. In addition to this control-maintenance function, enemies can also be used to absolve the individual of personal guilt, an oft-cited function of the scapegoat. More generally, enemies are often used in the construction of a valued personal identity.

Anthropological evidence supports the contention that, in cultures around the globe, enemies often serve the different proximal functions identified by Becker. Douglas (1966) argues that members of diverse cultures around the world associate enemies with enigmatic forces operating outside culturally sanctioned patterns for appearance and behavior. In this way, the presence of enemies reinforces (through contrast) the individuals' sense of who they are: a valuable person with an explicit, sanctioned identity. In addition to this identity-maintenance function, belief in malevolent people and supernatural agents has been shown to help satisfy motives to bolster personal control among South Africans (e.g., Ashforth, 2001) and to reduce guilt among people living in rural areas of Ghana (Mendonsa, 1982) and Burma (Spiro, 1967).

It is important to note that although Becker asserted that enemies and scapegoats are used in multiple ways to maintain a sense of one's valued identity, he believed (as do we) that the diverse functions served by enemies ultimately fulfill the more distal goal of obtaining symbolic immortality (and thereby denying death). The implication of this analysis is that death denial is not a simple process; individuals require multiple

psychological structures – such as a valued personal identity and a sense that the world is controllable – to effectively assuage the fear of mortality. Similarly, although the different functions of enemyship may be ultimately traced back to death denial, it is useful in empirical studies to separately examine how enemyship upholds the intermediate structures sheltering the individual from this supreme terror (for a related perspective, see Sullivan, Landau, and Kay, 2012).

All the processes of interpersonal enemyship are exacerbated, through group psychological phenomena, at the political level. Like personal enemies, political enemies and scapegoats serve four existential functions for individuals and groups: direct death denial, as well as the distinct death-denying functions of identity maintenance, control maintenance, and guilt denial (Becker, 1975). In previous social-psychological studies, these four functions have been separately examined. Using our integrative existential theory, we will weave these previously separate lines of inquiry together and show how the different functions of enemyship are interrelated.

Enemyship in service of death denial

Becker posited that enemyship buffers people from thoughts of death that – because they are repressed – are not typically available to introspective awareness. How, then, can we empirically test this analysis? TMT addresses this question with a dual-process model of defense against the awareness of mortality. When people are consciously aware of their mortality, they typically respond with so-called *proximal* defenses: They deny their vulnerability to death in an immediate and literal way. However, when death-related cognitions are resonating at the fringes of consciousness, people respond with *distal* defense: They cling to symbolic constructs that have nothing literally to do with physical death but rather function to uphold a basis for symbolic immortality (see Greenberg, Landau, and Arndt, 2013). In this way, people rely on symbolically mediated processes – like enemyship – to deny death indirectly, without conscious awareness that their defense functions as a form of denial.

In line with this model, numerous studies have shown that when thoughts of mortality are accessible but outside current focal attention, people are more likely to engage in political enemyship as a distal defense against death. For example, some of the earliest studies demonstrating terror-management processes (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon *et al.*, 1990) did so by showing that reminders of death (relative to reminders of other topics) increased US participants' subsequent tendency to engage in worldview defense, which was measured in the form of both

participants' liking for a person who praised the USA and their dislike for someone who attacked US values. It is important to recognize that in these studies, revulsion against a hated out-group member was just as important a response to nonconscious death concerns as attraction towards a person who affirmed one's political values. More dramatic evidence comes from studies (McGregor, Lieberman, Greenberg *et al.*, 1998) showing that death thoughts (compared to a control condition) actually increased participants' physical aggression against a person who belonged to an opposing political party.

Additional research on political worldview defense induced by mortality salience has explicated many of the details of this process. For example, Castano, Yzerbyt, Paladino *et al.* (2002) found that mortality reminders increased bias for one's national in-group relative to another nation, and that this effect occurred through a corresponding increase in the perceived entitativity, or cohesiveness, of one's in-group, as well as increased identification with the group. In other words, reminders of one's personal mortality induce attempts to identify with a group (political or otherwise) seen as transcending the self and being in some sense an immortal, lasting entity. This bid for immortality through political identification comes with a price, however – an immediate heightened revulsion towards political enemies and other groups.

Political enemyship elicited by death-related anxiety can have some surprisingly counterintuitive and insidious effects. In one study (Hayes, Schimel, and Williams, 2008), Christian participants who read an article threatening their religious worldview showed an increase in the accessibility of death-related thoughts. This follows from the TMT perspective that our cultural worldviews provide us with an anxiety buffer protecting against the awareness of death: When our protective cultural beliefs are attacked, death anxiety creeps back into conscious awareness. Most interestingly, however, if worldview-threatened participants read an article about several Muslims dying in a plane crash – in other words, if members of what could be perceived as an enemy group perished – they did *not* show an increase in death-related thoughts. In other words, learning of the death of one's enemy alleviates a heightened concern with one's own death that is otherwise present under threat. Death denial (perhaps ironically) motivates individuals not only to seek out enemies but also to be invested in their destruction.

Enemyship in service of identity maintenance

Our brief review of the role of death concerns in fueling intergroup enemyship points to a key assumption of the social scientific investigation

of political enemyship: enemies reinforce (political) identities. As discussed, focused mortality salience seems to elevate enemyship via an increased sense of in-group identification (Castano *et al.*, 2002). Other work in social psychology has focused more exclusively on the connection between enemyship and the construction and maintenance of social identities (of course, for Becker, the goal of identity maintenance ultimately served the purpose of death denial).

Research in the social identity theory tradition suggests that mere comparisons between one's in-group and an out-group will automatically orient the individual towards enemyship-related cognitions, particularly to the extent that the individual is invested in the in-group as a positive source of identity. For example, when people are asked to think about their (national) in-group relative to various out-groups, positive correlations emerge between one's sense of pride in and identification with the in-group, on the one hand, and derogation of out-groups on the other hand (Mummendey, Klink, and Brown, 2001). However, these correlations are weaker if one has not been explicitly primed to engage in intergroup comparison.

Of course, political leaders have long recognized the power of orienting their followers towards comparisons with enemy out-groups to escalate in-group identification and foster political zeal. The tactic of rallying individuals to support the in-group more fervently by pointing to the presence of a scapegoat or enemy group has historically been most successful in situations of widespread social uncertainty (a point to which we will return in a later section of this chapter). Accordingly, research shows that the likelihood that people's strivings for group-based identity will prompt them to derogate enemies is increased in uncertain circumstances (e.g., Hogg, 2012). When individuals are feeling uncertain about their future (and particularly their economic future) they have a greater preference for membership in radical or authoritarian groups with rigid identities (Hogg, Meehan, and Farquharson, 2010; Sales, 1972). Clear political identities can resolve feelings of uncertainty, while often reinforcing (and being reinforced by) processes of political enemyship and polarization. For example, when US Democrats and Republicans were induced to feel uncertain about key aspects of their lives, they evinced a positive correlation between perceptions that their political party is an entitative group and of the relative polarization of their party's attitudes on important issues compared to the other group (Sherman, Hogg, and Maitner, 2009). In short, uncertainty about one's identity prompts construal of one's political group as having a clear identity to the extent that it is contrasted with that of an enemy out-group.

Enemyship in service of control maintenance

Becker (1969, 1975) proposed that because people recognize that the environments through which they move are filled with random sources of hazard, they are motivated to see themselves as having powerful enemies to whom all potential danger may be traced. Relatively speaking, human enemies are easy to predict, avoid, and even defeat. This analysis suggests an interesting hypothesis – namely, that it is exactly when people feel like their sense of personal control is under threat that they should be most desirous of having powerful enemies.

We (Sullivan, Landau, and Rothschild, 2010) tested this hypothesis in the political arena just prior to the 2008 US presidential election. We primed half of our participants with a reminder that they have little control over multiple sources of hazard, ranging from communicable diseases to accidents during travel. The other participants were not reminded of such hazards. We then asked participants the extent to which they endorsed different conspiracy theories claiming that the candidate opposed to their preferred candidate was orchestrating attempts to steal the election. In confirmation of our hypothesis, those participants whose sense of control had been threatened were more likely to believe that their political enemy (in this case, either President Barack Obama or Senator John McCain) had enough power and malicious intent to rig the election.

Becker's analysis suggests that this effect occurred because people rely on identifiable enemies to maintain control in a chaotic world. If this is indeed the case, then we would expect that having a clear enemy would actually *increase* people's sense of control under threatening circumstances. To test this, we (Rothschild, Landau, Sullivan *et al.*, 2012) drew on the observation that enemies can be used as scapegoats to explain particular cases of hazard. Complex and long-term threats like global climate change that are difficult to comprehend can be perceived as uncontrollable. However, if such a threat can be blamed on a particular scapegoat group, this might increase people's conviction that they understand the cause of the threat and that it therefore is not beyond their personal control.

Accordingly, we (Rothschild *et al.*, 2012) exposed some participants to a portrayal of global climate change as a poorly understood threat, and others to information suggesting that the causes of this catastrophe are well understood. Participants were then presented with information either about a group that could serve as a viable scapegoat for explaining climate change (oil companies), or about a group that could not reasonably explain this threat (the Amish). Among those participants who thought about climate change as an unexplained threat, personal control

was increased if they were given oil companies as a scapegoat to explain the phenomenon. Thus, evidence shows not only that people will artificially imbue enemies and scapegoats with power in order to bolster their sense of control, but also that exposure to these targets does in fact serve this function.

Enemyship in service of guilt denial

Political enemies do not only help individuals maintain valued identities by providing them with a sense of personal control. Enemies can also be used as scapegoats in the more traditional sense of the term, meaning people can transfer blame for negative events from themselves to their enemies, absolving themselves of guilt. This tactic is used frequently by political pundits and party leaders, as when Democrats attempt to portray Republicans as responsible for the current problems in the US economy, and vice versa.

In our studies on scapegoating in response to the threat of climate change (Rothschild *et al.*, 2012), we examined the possibility that this process can facilitate guilt denial in addition to control maintenance. In one study, college students were presented with descriptions of climate change as either a poorly understood, uncontrollable threat, or as the direct fault of the participants' group (i.e., young Americans). The latter framing posed a threat to the moral value of that group's identity, and thereby to the self. Relative to a neutral control condition, participants were more likely to scapegoat oil companies for climate change in either threat condition; but whereas the effect of a control threat on scapegoating was mediated by perceived personal control, the effect of a moral value threat occurred through guilt feelings. Furthermore, mirroring the results described in the previous section, participants who were blamed for climate change but then presented with a viable scapegoat group showed reduced feelings of personal guilt compared to blamed participants presented with a nonviable target. In addition, exposure to a scapegoat reduced participants' willingness to take personal action to stop climate change after being blamed for this catastrophe.

In sum, empirical studies have shown that political enemyship and scapegoating processes facilitate death and guilt denial as well as identity and control maintenance, at both personal and group levels. However, social psychologists have not paid a great deal of attention to the broader social and cultural factors that might encourage individuals to rely specifically on enemyship processes as a means of satisfying these existential motives. Obviously, people can deny death, establish clear identities, maintain a sense of personal control, and unburden themselves of guilt

through a variety of outlets and mechanisms (despite the fact that, as many of the cited theorists have argued, enemyship seems to be a prominent means of fulfilling these functions across different cultural and historical settings). Why is it that, today especially, political enemyship, conspiracy theories, and related phenomena seem to be on the rise (as many of the chapters in this volume attest to)? To answer this question, we will supplement the existential theory of enemyship with a sociological perspective.

A sociological perspective on political enemyship

The sociological literature on enemyship and scapegoating has yielded at least three major insights. These insights help us understand: (1) how the process of socially constructing political enemies tends to imbue them with certain characteristics; (2) the social circumstances under which enemyship processes are most likely to occur in general (a factor we refer to as “quantitative variation in enemyship”); and (3) the social circumstances under which certain kinds of enemyship or scapegoating processes are more likely to occur than others (what we refer to as “qualitative variation in enemyship”). We discuss each of these insights in turn. Some of our research has provided initial support for the first two points; however, the model of qualitative variation in enemyship remains largely untested, and therefore stands out as a potential starting point for future interdisciplinary research.

The social construction of ambiguously powerful enemies

Political enemies are social constructions or collective representations (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Smith, 1996). As Sartre (1948) argued, enemy groups are often imbued with such fantastic qualities that their representation ceases to have any real connection to their actual behavior, as in the case of the view of Jewish people as world-dominating conspirators held by many anti-Semites. Drawing on these ideas, Smith (1996) argued that certain forms of enemyship adopt the status of *chimeria*: socially constructed visions of a political figure or group that ascribe them fantastic powers beyond their actual reach.

Douglas (1966) described this quality of *chimeria* possessed by enemies in terms of the process of attributing *ambiguous power* to the enemy. In other words, people see their enemies as capable of perpetrating a wide range of misdeeds, and as operating outside the boundaries of condoned or conventionally understood power. If we draw on our existential

theory of political enemyship, it is easy to understand why enemies would be socially constructed as ambiguously powerful. Such representations readily allow people to use enemies as scapegoats to satisfy control maintenance and guilt-denial functions, because they are believed capable of carrying out a variety of misdeeds. In contrast, explicit representations of an enemy's capabilities and shortcomings limit the range of hazards and negative outcomes that can be attributed to them. In addition, as mentioned earlier, this process facilitates identity maintenance: In a conception of the world as a struggle between Good and Evil, an ambiguously powerful enemy serves as a point of contrast to define more explicitly the in-group's power as benevolent, morally sanctioned, honorable, and trustworthy.

In one of our studies (Sullivan *et al.*, 2010), we tested the sociological hypothesis that enemies perceived as ambiguously powerful would be most effective at performing a control-maintenance function. Participants whose sense of control was threatened and who were then exposed to a portrayal of the terrorist group Al-Qaeda as ambiguously powerful (e.g., enigmatic and poorly understood) actually showed higher perceptions of personal control than participants exposed to a portrayal of Al-Qaeda as weak or as having well-understood powers. This finding provides critical support for the idea that we construct ambiguous enemies to satisfy existential motives for control, because it is rather counterintuitive. Superficially, one would assume that exposure to a weak enemy would be more likely to boost control than exposure to a powerful one. However, ambiguous enemies serve as focal objects to which diverse sources of risk can be attributed. Accordingly, we found that the increase in perceived personal control occurred through a reduction in the perception of randomly distributed future risk among those participants who thought about Al-Qaeda as an ambiguously powerful enemy.

Quantitative variation in enemyship and scapegoating processes

The thrust of our hypothesis regarding quantitative variation in enemyship lies in a sociological formula provided by Douglas (1966). In *ordered systems* – social environments where norms for behavior are clear, individuals have a basic sense of existential security, and institutions are stable and trusted – people tend to respond to threats to their basic motives by bolstering the perceived power of benevolent sources of authority, such as the government or a supreme deity. Within such ordered systems, religious beliefs, a sense of civic responsibility, or feelings of patriotism often serve to meet the various existential needs that, as Becker argued,

enemies can also fulfill. In *disordered systems* – environments where norms are unclear, people feel existentially insecure, and institutions are unstable and distrusted – people tend to respond to threats to their motives through enemyship processes. In other words, when people cannot turn to broader social institutions (such as religion or a sense of nationalism) to obtain existential equanimity, they will be more likely to rely on enemies to meet this need.

This analysis has been supported in different historical and sociological analyses. For example, Staub (1989) examined cases of genocide – such as the Nazi Holocaust and the Turkish genocide of Armenians – and found that they all occurred under what he referred to as *difficult life conditions*, meaning the widespread presence of economic problems and violence in a society, rapid industrialization and technological advance in a society, or both. Staub (1989) proposes that difficult life conditions threaten people's basic sense of positive identity and perceived control, and that people often respond to this system disorder through scapegoating. In related analyses, sociologists have argued that conditions of social fragmentation (stemming from globalization processes and financial crises) have contributed substantially to the recent rise of radical, right-wing populist movements in Western Europe and the USA (Antonio, 2000; Betz, 1994; Smith, 1996). These movements often include as a primary ideological component the vilification of immigrant out-groups and other political enemies.

Building on this context-specific sociological research, we (Sullivan *et al.*, 2010) experimentally tested the notion that people would be more likely to rely on enemyship for control maintenance under general conditions of system disorder. Specifically, we manipulated whether American participants saw the USA as an ordered system in which economic and law enforcement institutions are reliable, or as a disordered system with a fragile economy and unstable government. Participants primed with system order and a threat to personal control ascribed more compensatory power to the US government, but those primed with system disorder instead responded to a control threat with elevated perceptions of the power of their personal enemies.

Qualitative variation in enemyship and scapegoating processes

As has been clear throughout this chapter, enemyship and scapegoating are not uniform phenomena: they can arise as a primary function of different motives, and in a variety of nuanced ways. Furthermore, these processes can be examined at multiple levels. For example, we can

distinguish between the antagonistic relationship of two enemy individuals and the political enmity of two opposing parties. We have argued that enmity of all kinds is more likely to occur in disordered systems. But we believe it is also possible to predict, as a function of certain social conditions that might coincide with general system disorder, the forms of enmity that will be most afforded under particular sociohistorical circumstances.

At least the sketch of such a model of qualitative variation in enmity is provided by Douglas (1994). She identifies three general patterns that foster differing forms of enmity. By distinguishing between these patterns, we acknowledge that a disordered social system can be manifested in various ways. The first pattern could be described as *system disorder under general conditions of existential insecurity*. Here we use the term “existential insecurity” in a sociological sense (Norris and Inglehart, 2004) to indicate societies where the majority of individuals do not feel that they are adequately protected against prominent dangers (e.g., disease or death through warfare). We refer to the second pattern as *system disorder under totalitarianism*. The final pattern distinguished by Douglas is best described as *system disorder with resource inequality*. We will briefly describe how system disorder manifests differently in each of these potential sociohistorical patterns, and present hypotheses about the type and function of political enmity that will likely occur under each.

System disorder under general conditions of existential insecurity

This pattern might be considered the “rawest” form of system disorder. When most individuals in a society feel that their lives are under daily threat, from either violence or unfavorable environmental circumstances, there are few countervailing social structures to alleviate a sense of widespread system disorder. This pattern might describe the life conditions of many early human groups in the environment of evolutionary adaptedness, but it persists today in regions characterized by civil war or a history of devastating economic exploitation by colonial powers. According to Douglas (1994), in such circumstances individuals often dedicate their allegiance to small groups which provide a minimal amount of existential security. This analysis is partly supported by research (Gelfand, Raver, Nishii *et al.*, 2011) showing that nations characterized by existential insecurity tend to have “tight” cultures, wherein individuals sacrifice individual interests to the benefit of the group. For example, Pakistan is a country that in its recent history has struggled with population density, political instability, terrorism, and major damage from natural disasters

(such as flooding and earthquakes). It also scores very high on measures of cultural tightness, such as the perception that strong norms for behavior in particular situations are shared by all group members (Gelfand *et al.*, 2011).

The tightly organized groups that fight for survival under these conditions often view most out-groups as enemies. Of course, under general conditions of existential insecurity, resources are typically scarce, and groups are often actively involved in real conflicts over basic means of survival. Enemyship in these circumstances is most likely to be manifested as intergroup hostility. In addition to the potential for winning better access to limited resources, this intergroup enemyship also serves important symbolic functions. Enemyship in these circumstances primarily facilitates death denial and identity maintenance. By identifying a hated out-group as the source of all evil, groups can gain a sense of symbolic immortality even under material conditions of existential insecurity. And in a disordered system where group boundaries are often in a potential state of flux (e.g., an infrastructure is lacking for the assignment of formal citizenship), the construction of an enemy out-group helps solidify in-group identity and membership.

System disorder under totalitarian conditions

In many historical situations, conditions of economic and political disorder have set the stage for the temporary rise of a totalitarian regime. Here we use the term “totalitarianism” to refer to the (sometimes forced, sometimes willing) submission of people’s individual liberties to an autocratic leader with a heroic vision of the in-group’s identity (Fromm, 1941; Marcuse, 2009/1968). The widespread uncertainty about the future and personal value that characterizes system disorder often increases the willingness of individuals to support a tyrannical but forceful leader and regime that at least offer some certain vision of what the future will hold and of who is valuable in society.

In some instances, totalitarianism can rise due to the exclusive use of brute military force; however, in most instances, certain groups of people within the social system willingly allow the totalitarian government to come to power. This usually occurs (at least in part) because the totalitarian leader(s) identifies a scapegoat on which in-group members can blame the current circumstances of system disorder (Douglas, 1994). The regime promises to expunge the scapegoat group, or at least remove them from power, and through this process to restore order, symbolic value, and prosperity to the in-group. As individuals generally seek scapegoats when their feelings of personal control and moral worthiness

are under threat, system disorder increases the likelihood that they will sacrifice liberties in exchange for a scapegoat ideology and the promise of renewed order.

Thus, in these circumstances, enemyship typically takes the form of the persecution of a minority scapegoat group. In addition to aiding the totalitarian regime's rise to power, this form of enemyship primarily serves symbolic functions of death and guilt denial. The compelling leader constructs a simplistic dualist ideology of perpetual warfare between the good in-group and the evil scapegoat group, which promises in-group members a revolutionary sense of immortality, galvanizing their self-sacrificial potentialities (Lifton, 1968; Schori, Klar, and Roccas, 2009). At the same time, blaming system disorder on the scapegoat group absolves in-group members of the potential self-blame and worthlessness they might otherwise experience in undesirable economic circumstances. This guilt-denial function is bound up with the fact that, under totalitarian conditions, scapegoating is often of an intragroup nature: A minority subculture that was once part of the in-group is now reconstructed as aligned with malevolent forces that must be weeded out to preserve the "true" in-group's purity (Adorno, 2000/1975). And once the totalitarian government begins to commit symbolic and physical violence against scapegoated individuals, further vilification – perhaps to the point of genocide – of the scapegoat group is necessary to deny a mounting sense of potential guilt (Becker, 1975).

System disorder with resource inequality

A final sociohistorical manifestation of system disorder is one that is increasingly common in the modern world – namely, system disorder with sustained income inequality. This form of system disorder is distinguishable from that of a totalitarian regime because it can emerge within a politically democratic society. In the modern variants of this form, unregulated capitalist economic organization allows a radically uneven distribution of material and authoritative (e.g., educational, informational) resources to take place, resulting in large disparities between a small number of individuals of high socioeconomic status and a majority of lower-status persons (e.g., Giddens, 1983).

Massive levels of income inequality can generate social-psychological conditions of *anomie* (normlessness) and mistrust between individuals (Oishi, Kesebir, and Diener, 2011). With little regulation on the distribution of and processes for acquiring resources, individuals at the lower end of the economic continuum feel dissatisfied and helpless, while those at the higher end often become preoccupied with a "dizzying

quest” for obtaining a seemingly infinite (but potentially volatile) store of wealth (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Duménil and Lévy, 2011). Furthermore, the deregulated capitalist mode of socioeconomic organization that often generates income inequality simultaneously fosters a consumerist psychology and a plurality of values which leave the individual uncertain about the proper routes to achieving a valued identity (Simmel, 1978/1900). Under these circumstances, general feelings of uncertainty and looming control threat combine with high levels of mistrust to elevate reliance on political enemyship and conspiracy theories for psychological equanimity (Douglas, 1994). In short, individuals use enemies primarily to maintain a sense of personal control, tracing their economic misfortunes (or potential misfortunes) back to the alleged machinations of politicians and others whom they see as possessing more power and resources than they. At the same time, those who have higher socioeconomic status under conditions of mass income inequality often scapegoat the working class, attempting to project any guilt they might feel for their superior fortune by seeing those worse off than them as responsible for their fate.

To summarize, we predict that when system disorder takes the form of general existential insecurity, enemyship will be manifested as inter-group hostility, facilitating death denial and identity maintenance; when it takes the form of totalitarianism, enemyship will be manifested as the scapegoating of a minority group, facilitating death and guilt denial; and when it takes the form of resource inequality, enemyship will be manifested in conspiracy theories and other forms of political enemyship, facilitating control maintenance and guilt denial. Although some historical and sociological data support these hypotheses concerning qualitative variation in enemyship, the model remains at this point mostly speculative. However, for scholars interested in making predictions about the types of enemyship and scapegoating processes that are likely to emerge in future social, economic, and political circumstances, these hypotheses offer fertile ground for empirical research.

Conclusion

We believe that the existential-sociological framework outlined in this chapter offers a powerful explanation of enemyship processes. At the beginning of this chapter, we proposed that a valid account of enemyship should explain both its basic irrationality and its multiplicity of form and function. Building on classic and contemporary perspectives in existential psychology, our framework explains enemyship’s irrationality as stemming from an urgent need to allay the anxiety inherent in our

existential situation – where every part of us desires to live, yet we know that that desire will inevitably be thwarted. Hence, we desperately strive to transcend mortality by constructing a valued identity and defending that fragile symbolic construction against anything that threatens to invalidate it. Drawing on sociological analyses of the factors behind differences in political ideology and overarching worldview, our framework explains multiformity in enemyship as a function of social structural elements that shape collective beliefs about how much order exists in the social system, where that order originates, and the availability of opportunities to establish a valued identity.

Throughout this chapter we have seen how this framework can be used to integrate theories and laboratory evidence across a range of disciplines and research programs, as well as to generate novel, testable hypotheses that warrant further study. Our existential-sociological perspective does not fully replace realistic conflict theories and other accounts that might explain enemyship in terms of practical struggles between political groups. However, it goes further than such perspectives to explain some rather counterintuitive findings, such as the fact that people will actually feel a heightened sense of personal control when they contemplate a powerful enemy. As a final demonstration of the usefulness of our model, we will conclude by highlighting a few suggestions it offers for interventions that might reduce the prevalence of enemyship over the long term.

One possibility – against the arguments of theorists like Schmitt who insist on the necessity of intergroup conflict – is to redirect enemyship processes such that people focus their malice on common enemies, like world hunger and disease. But another broad possibility is to promote societal conditions of anxiety-buffering order – or at least the perception of order – by investing faith in benevolent leaders and institutions. Different ways to achieve this goal are suggested by our model of qualitative variation in enemyship. Simply helping people meet their basic demands for survival, and thereby increasing their felt existential security, should reduce enemyship. At a more symbolic level, in disordered circumstances where the rise of totalitarianism seems like a possibility, people should be offered a positive vision of their group as having a valued – and humanitarian – identity, to counteract the appeal of a revolutionary fascist vision rooted in enemyship. Finally, in postindustrial conditions of widespread income inequality, measures should be taken to restore to individuals a sense of personal control and agency in their life circumstances, so that the need for enemyship and conspiratorial ideologies is reduced. Naturally, working to reduce income inequality itself is the most straightforward means of accomplishing this aim.

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